

# **Henrik Ibsen**

**The father of modern drama**

*Dr. Azher Suleiman*

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## *Introduction*

The theatre of the Scandinavia at the early nineteenth century was particularly deplorable and sterile. The dramatic writings were either following the French dramatist Eugène Scribe's (1791-1861) well-made play or the sensational, witty, cynical, dashing and sardonic comedies. Both types of drama were thematically unrelated to everyday life. The plays presented on stage at that time reflected the taste of an aristocratic audience. The main topics of such drama were sex, fashioned intrigues, marriage and adultery. They disregarded the personal conflicts of the characters and the interrelationships among them. The idea of exploiting the theatre as a soap-box for the dramatist's social, economical and philosophical thinking was not assimilated yet. In general, drama did not conceive of the stage as a medium for anything but pure entertainment and romance. The people themselves were going to theatres not to see reproductions of life but what they were looking for was a type of melodrama or farce in which acting was highly artificial and unlikelike and actors used to declaim their lines. However, Norway was eager to establish an independent dramatic literature and life. To achieve this purpose, a theatre was established in Bergen in 1849. The two Norwegian dramatists Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Henrik Ibsen found that theatre an ideal means to establish new drama.

In Scandinavia\*, Realism appeared as a social and political need. The Scandinavian realists wanted to debate social issues not only for aesthetic reasons, but in order to bring about social change. The women's question is a good example. Women had no right to vote, could not hold political office, and were not entitled to control their own property. They had no access to higher education and were expected to spend their lives as wives and mothers. If they did not marry, they could usually look forward to a difficult old age in the home of a brother or sister. Most of the reforms that improved the lives and economic situation of women were first advocated by writers of novels, short stories, and plays.

The successor to national romanticism was realism, which also came from outside Scandinavia, particularly France, where two of its greatest practitioners were the writers Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880), best known for his novel *Madame Bovary* (1857), and Honore' de Balzac (1799–1850). The term *realism* in literary studies denotes a style that tries to describe life as it is, without idealization or subjectivity. (Fisher: 2008, 395) In the present context, however, it also refers to Scandinavian prose and drama written from around 1840 through the 1880s, but particularly in the 1870s. Only a few works from the 1840s can confidently be termed realistic. The best early example of realists in Scandinavian literature is arguably the Swedish novelist Carl Jonas (1793–1866), which anticipates one of the favorite subjects of the realists, namely, the position of women in the family and in society. But the pseudonymous writings of the

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\* In the Scandinavian countries the term is applied exclusively to Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

Danish philosopher-writer Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) may also be considered an example of realist concerns, inasmuch as they are written in conscious opposition to the ideas of the German romantics. Kierkegaard's story of deceit and manipulation "Forførerens Dagbog" (1843) *The Seducer's Diary*, certainly shares many of the features of realist literature from the later decades.

Realism coexisted with late romantic idealism in Scandinavian literature throughout the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s, but an event in 1871 marks its complete triumph on the Scandinavian literature. This event, after which any other literary style was clearly passé, was the first in a series of lectures given by the Danish critic Georg Brandes (1842–1927), in which he called for a literary practice that would use literature to debate modern problems and issues. It is no exaggeration to say that just about every progressive writer in Scandinavia fell into line. In Denmark, Jens Peter Jacobsen produced two realist novels that adhered to the new program: *Marie Grubbe* (1876) and *Niels Lyhne* (1880). Swedish writer August Strindberg (1849–1912) wrote a great novel *The Red Room* (1879, which offers a panoramic view of life among artists, intellectuals, and government employees in Stockholm. In Norway, we can regard Henrik Ibsen not only the father of modern drama but also as the father of realism. He was a leader in the campaign for a modern radical and realistic literature in the cultural life of Scandinavia of this age, and challenged the values of middle-class society and formulated the basic rights and liberties of the individual.

### *The Playwright*

Henrik Johan Ibsen (1828-1906) was an important Norwegian dramatist, social critic and agitator for women's rights. He is known to be the father of realism and has been a pioneer in the transformation and revolution of modern drama. Ibsen was a leader in the campaign for a modern radical and realistic literature in the cultural life of Scandinavia of this age, and challenged the values of middle-class society and formulated the basic rights and liberties of the individual. Charles Lyons describes him as "the realist, the iconoclast, the successful or failed idealist, the poet, the psychologist, the romantic, the antiromantic." (Lyons: 1987, 4) He was one of the four great ones with Alexander Kiell (1849-1906), Jonas Lie (1833–1908) and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson of the nineteenth century Norwegian literature.

In 1850, Ibsen traveled to Christiania (now Oslo) to take his A-level, presumably with the idea of beginning studies in medicine at the university. Unfortunately, his grades were too low to gain admission. He was occasionally earned from his journalistic writings. About 1851 the violinist Ole Bull (1810-1880) gave Ibsen the position of "theatre poet" at the newly built National Theatre in Bergen – a post which he held for six years. In the same year, he wrote two plays, namely, *Catiline*, a tragedy, which reflected the atmosphere of the revolutionary year of 1848, and the *Burial Mound*. Although he never became a good director and his plays were mostly unsuccessful, the year in Bergen gave him invaluable experience in practical stagecraft.

As a dramatic author and director, first in Bergen then in Christiania, Ibsen staged hundred of plays, wrote several of his own, and the process became a thoroughgoing theatrical professional. He was awarded a substantial grant by the Norwegian government to travel and study in Italy. He also had financial help from Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. He left Norway in 1864, spending the next 27 years in Italy and Germany, returning to Norway only for brief visits. He returned to Norway in 1891 and he settled down in Christiania and lived there until his death in (1906). He wrote in all 26 dramatic works (see Appendix 1) and some 300 poems.

Ibsen's work is generally divided by critics into three phases. The first phase consists of his early dramas written in verse and modeled after romantic historical tragedy and Norse sagas: *Catiline*, (1850). The main character in this historical drama is the noble Roman Lucius Catilina, based on the historical figure of Catiline. Like the characters in many of Ibsen's later plays, Catiline is torn between two women, his wife Aurelia and the Vestal virgin Furia: one of them embodies domestic virtues, the other his calling and, significantly, his death. Harold Clurman says that "the audience would hardly have been capable of seeing any connection between the Rome of the play and the conditions in Norway." (Clurman: 1977, 29) As characteristic of Ibsen's early work the play is metrical (iambic pentameter) in blank verse. *The Burial Mound* (1850) (also known as *The Warrior's Barrow*) is a one-act dramatic poem that portrays an incident from the heroic age of Norse conquest. Landing on an island off the coast of Sicily, Gandalf, a young pagan chieftain who personifies the rough Viking tradition, confronts the tempering Mediterranean influence of Christianity in young, innocent Blanka. Sworn to avenge his father's death, Gandalf learns that Blanka has in fact saved his life, and he subsequently returns to Norway with her. *Norma* or *A Politician's Love* (1851) is a drama written as an opera parody. It is an odd job of only marginal interest among Ibsen's works. The characters are all caricatures of well-known parliamentarians, projected in the manner of light-fingered journalism and political cabaret. But there are three aspects of the play that deserve attention: it shows a coming dramatist's first attempt in the genre of political satire; there are elements in the play that point to *The League of Youth*, which Ibsen wrote almost two decades later and finally it is the first example of Ibsen's comic verse. *St. John's Eve* (1852) is considered apocryphal; because it never entered Ibsen's collected works. It is in prose. The play takes into account variants of romantic nationalism in Norway. Julian Paulsen, a student poetaster, is pretentiously affected in his self-regard as a deep thinker and aesthete. He admits that his natural self does not conform with his aestheticism. He is a committed and passionate nationalist in the mode of the day. He advocates the use of the old Norse language to stress Norway's difference from Denmark. A sensible girl, Juliana, suggests that if he were to employ the archaic tongue, no one would understand him. *Lady Inger of Oestraat* (1854) is unsuccessful historical play. It is entirely in prose. Its story is about two strong women Lady Inger and her daughter Eline. The main events of

the play deal with Norway's struggle for independence from Danish rule in the late Middle Ages. *The Feast of Solhaug* (1856) is the first publicly successful play. This comedy is composed in folk-ballad style. It takes place at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Margit, the young wife of Bergt Gauteson, married him because he was the wealthy master of the great estate of Solhony. She had been in love with Gudmund Alfson, in exile on being falsely accused of siding with the enemy while Norway was at war with Denmark. When the play begins, Gudmund has stolen back to the homeland and takes refuge with Margit and her younger sister Signe. Margit nearly succeeds in poisoning her husband to get her lover. But Gudmund has fallen in love with the younger sister. Throughout many complications and misunderstanding, everything is happily settled down and resolved: Berget escapes death and Gudmund gets Signe and no blood is shed. *Olaf Liljekrans* (1857) resembles a fairy tale. Olaf roaming about in an uninhabited mountain valley becomes enchanted with its sole female survivor, Alfild., an old minstrel's daughter. But he has plighted his troth to Ingeborg, the daughter of a rich landowner, Arne of Guldvik (again a contrast between two types of women). Though Olaf has declared his love for Alfild, which she reciprocates, he is duty-bound to marry Ingeborg, and is rather frightened by the spell alfild has cast upon him. All ends well. Ingeborg marries her lover Hemming. Alfild protests to her father that she wants to follow Olaf back to where he lives down in the village. *The Vikings at Helgeland* (1858) is set in the tenth century, based on old Icelandic Family Sagas. It is a blood-and-thunder melodrama\*, full of killing, oaths of vengeance, duals and fierce heroics to sustain codes of honors. *Love's Comedy* (1862) presents two couples, one couple become enslaved to convention after their private life is intruded as a result of marriage. The other couple, who fear ending up like the first couple, decide to part and live in the memory of their love. The play explores the vulgar convention of marriage at odds with true passionate love. *The Pretenders* (1863) is a historical-chronicle play. It evolves around the historical conflict between Norwegian King Håkon Håkonsson and his father-in-law; Earl Skule Bårdsson. *Brand* (1866) is a symbolic tragedy provides an unsparing vision of a priest driven by faith to risk the lives of his wife and child. He invites people to follow him to the mountains to worship God. After a brief practical experience of this arrangement, the people change their minds, and stone him. "The very mountains themselves stone him, indeed; for he is killed by an avalanche." (Shaw: 1986, 66) *Peer Gynt* (1867) is a mock heroic fantasy. It is about a poor Norwegian man raised on fairy tales leads a life of self indulgence and fidelity to his Gyntian Self. His exploits involve ruining young maidens, escaping from trolls, dealing in slaves, and becoming a prophet and wandering the desert.

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\* A type of drama that highlights suspense and romantic sentiment, with characters who are usually either clearly good or bad. As its name implies, the form frequently uses a musical background to underscore or heighten the emotional tone of a scene. Melodrama first achieved great popularity on the 19th-century stage. Its appeal continues today in many films and television plays.

When finally returns home, Gynt discovers that his 'true self' dissolved due to his self-seeking and ruinous lifestyle. It is a study in individualism. Brand has consisted of giving oneself to those most in need; Peer's individualism is only selfishness. He always forfeits himself to avoid confrontation with any difficulty; he is the emperor of compromise, a spiritual cipher. He is the manifestation of that cowardly egotism that lives only for itself. The play is, however, difficult for many of the symbols and references from Norwegian folk mythology are unfamiliar to the English-speaking readers. After *Peer Gynt* Ibsen never wrote another play in verse. *The League of Youth* (1869) is a comedy of political satire and criticism which revolves about an aspiring, self aggrandizing leader of liberal causes wins public favor after attacking a town leader who once snubbed him. Drunk with success, the leader becomes enamored of polite society and ends up praising the man he once attacked in order to secure his place in polite society and enjoy the comfortable life it offers - precisely the lifestyle he once attacked. *Emperor and Galilean* (1873) is Ibsen's longest play, and he considered it his magnum opus. This historical play is about the Roman Emperor Julian the Apostate and is written in two parts with five acts in each part. He converts many to the cause of Christ but he himself is a half-hearted Christian. Later, he tries to restore the old Roman gods, but he feels the same disillusionment he had first with Christianity. He eventually becomes Emperor, which only hardens him toward Christianity and the Roman gods. He seeks out a mystic who teaches him that a new way is coming that will free man - the realization that God is in man himself. Generally speaking, the plays of the first phase are noted primarily for their idiosyncratic Norwegian characters and for their emerging elements of satire and general social criticism.

The second phase covers the years in which he wrote most of the plays of protest against social conditions which begins with the appearance of *The Pillars of the Community* (1877). The play is about a man, prominent in his small town, and full of righteous indignation over the dishonorable acts of the outside world, commits these very same acts to maintain his own respectability. His adulterous affair ruins many lives and scandalizes the town. He discovers that the true pillars of society are Truth (facing all the facts) and Freedom (from the hypocrisy of respectability). *A Doll's House* (1879) is about a couple with three children who live a seemingly pleasant middle class life until individual, economic and social circumstances force a change in the wife's attitude which leads her to leave her family seeking her own freedom. The play is often considered a masterpiece of Realist Theater. The account of the collapse of a middle-class marriage, this work, in addition to sparking debate about women's rights and divorce, is also regarded as innovative and daring because of its emphasis on psychological tension rather than external action. This technique required that emotion be conveyed through small, controlled gestures, shifts in inflection, and pauses, and therefore instituted a new style of acting. *The Ghosts* (1881) revolves about a wife of a philandering drunkard who is forced to sacrifice her life because of societal convention. Hoping to save her son from an

affair with a girl (his half sister from an affair between his father and a servant girl) she decides to send him away to grow up. The son returns, the very picture of his dissolute father. When the son starts to suffer from syphilis (inherited from his father), the wife faces the choice of administering poison upon his request. *A Public Enemy* (1882) deals with Dr. Stockmann's attempts to expose a water pollution scandal in his home town, which is about to establish itself as a spa. When his brother, the mayor, conspires with local politicians and the newspaper to suppress the story, Stockmann appeals to the public meeting - only to be shouted down and reviled as 'an enemy of the people'.

The third phase is marked by Ibsen's symbolic plays. It starts with *The Wild Duck* (1884) which is regarded as one of Ibsen's greatest tragicomical works that explores the role of illusion and self-deception in everyday life. It relates a story of a family that is torn apart by the good intentions of an idealistic young man who believes that life's problems are solved by laying bare the truth and practicing the virtue of self sacrifice. This destroys a marriage and causes the good natured young daughter to kill herself rather than the family's beloved duck as atonement to her father. The play explores the dangers of forming ideals for others. *Rosmersholm* (1886) discusses the dilemma of a respectable priest who hopes to ennoble his parishioners' souls. His wife commits suicide to save her husband's reputation. He eventually falls in love with a young woman who encourages the priest to espouse her radical ideas in public. When he does, the public turns against the priest. The girl, her soul now ennobled, then plans to kill herself, both as atonement for the trouble she caused and as a display of her love for the priest. The priest, tormented over his wife's death and his inability to fulfill his original aims, joins the young woman in a suicidal leap into a mill stream to a union in death. *The Lady from the Sea* (1888) is about a widowed doctor who marries a wild girl raised near the raging sea. The girl remains wild and frivolous until the death of her first child. She begins longing for the sea and for a certain sailor she was once engaged to. One day the sailor shows up and inflames her heart. The doctor initially insists on obeying convention and fulfilling the duties of their marriage, but he soon comes to realize she must follow her heart after he realizes that desire is the true foundation of marriage. After being released by her husband and leaving with the sailor, the girl's frivolity completely disappears as she discovers her own strength and individuality. The play indicates that without responsibility there can be no valid meaning in freedom. *Hedda Gabler* (1890) is about a woman whose passion and power can only manifest themselves destructively. A moral coward under the pressure of social inhibition, Hedda becomes a corrupting and malefic force. When a selfish, cynical woman with a fascination for pistols tires of her marriage to a scholar, she wreaks havoc in the lives of others by attracting the attention of a friend, judge Brack, who indicates that he knows about the pistol, and expects Hedda's favors in return for his silence. When the judge tries to blackmail her into a relationship, she commits suicide instead. The play reveals Ibsen at the peak of his dramatic craftsmanship. *The Master Builder* (1892) is the first play



Ibsen writes following his return to Norway in 1891 after his twenty-seven-year absence abroad. *The Master Builder* chronicles the career and personal relationships of Halvard Solness, a man who has not let anything stand in the way of his rampant ambition. As he struggles with the destructive consequences of his monomaniacal pursuit and his growing fear that he has lost his creative powers, a mysterious young woman appears. She will help Solness gain a glimpse of his former robust self as she leads him to his tragic fate. In *The Master Builder*, Ibsen paints a fascinating portrait of one man's consuming desire for success. *Little Eyolf* (1894) concerns parental responsibility. A scholar and his wife have a crippled child who is cared for by the scholar's half sister, whom the scholar is very close to. The wife becomes jealous of her husband's affection for the boy and wishes the boy was carried off by the Rat-Wife, who leads people out in the sea to drown. The boy then drowns and the scholar reminds his wife of her words. Through old letters, the scholar learns that the woman he is close to and loves is not his half sister. They initially rejoice, but the 'half sister' fears the scholar's wife will be left alone, so the half sister goes off with another suitor, leaving the couple to rebuild their relationship while they devote themselves to the care of neglected children. *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896) revolves about a ruined bank manager, who lusts for power, and his self-centered wife, who longs for social respectability. They place hope in their son to return them to power and respectability. A noble-hearted woman, whom the bank manager used to love but whom he traded to an associate for power, raises the boy out of genuine love and concern. Once grown, the son shrugs off his parents' hopes for him and ignores the noble woman during her dying days. He instead leaves with a wealthy divorcee and a young girl to pursue a life of ease and pleasure. *When We Dead Awaken* (1899) is Ibsen's shortest play. It is an autobiographical play which deals with an aging rebel, despairing of life and racked with guilt, who experiences an ambiguous victory at the moment of death.

In these final works, Ibsen dealt with the conflict between art and life and shifted his focus from the individual in society to the individual alone and isolated. With *The Wild Duck* and *Hedda Gabler*, Ibsen entered a period of transition during which he continued to deal with modern, realistic themes and premises, but made increasing use of symbolism, metaphor, metamorphosis, characterization and unity of opposites.

### *Ibsen's Moral and Political Ideals and Criticism*

The themes of Ibsen's plays are reflections and dramatic incarnations of his own moral and socio-political points of view. They seem to be some central questions of the modern, bourgeois and capitalist age. Ibsen wrote in the second half of the nineteenth century. At that time the Scandinavian societies (of which Norway is a part) went through an enormous transformation by the breakthrough of modernization, capitalism and bourgeois society. Ibsen focused in many of his plays on problems of mature and capitalist society. He was concerned with the crisis of liberalism, the conflicts of the bourgeois families,

woman's emancipation, and the psychological break-down of the individual and the power of economy over human relations in capitalist society.

Ibsen was born into and grew up in a society that was underdeveloped compared to the rest of Western Europe. When he went into his "voluntary exile" on the European continent in 1864, he left a backward province only beginning to get a modern industry. Twenty seven years later he returned to a society that had undergone rapid development, capitalist industries had emerged at a fast pace, political conflicts were sharp and a strong national literary and artistic tradition had emerged. Ibsen thus had a European distance to the problems created by rapid change in a society in the periphery of capitalism. In Scandinavia the phases of capitalist development were pressed together in time, so the changes appeared as especially harsh and contradictory. Ibsen made these conflicts visible in their psychological effects. His dramas thus gave a core understanding of the social processes that made up the basis of late capitalist society.

Because of this advent of large-scale capitalism, overwhelming the self-supporting petty bourgeoisie, one of Ibsen's moral and political ideals was to criticize that capitalistic spirit which had invaded his small native country. It was a long fight for integrity and dignity, a battle against the despised servility and hypocrisy of the middle class and against the evils which the bourgeoisie beheld in its offspring and enemy – capitalism. Consequently, numerous revolutionary movements appeared at that time. As a youth of twenty Ibsen called upon the people to fight against tyrants, he wrote *Catiline* with case of a slandered rebel, which seethed with indignation. Generally, his early plays showed a kind of success since they dealt with patriotism, but he refused the encapsulation of his thought in any single designation. The themes of plays such as *The Burial Mound*, *Lady Inger of Ostraat*, *The Feast of Solhang* and *The Vikings at Helgeland* motivated in the middle-class the patriotic pride and Norway's Viking past and they evinced a spirit of protest against the capitalist debauch, against greed and vanity. Ibsen was duty bound to defend the independence and integrity that had been Brand's. His political and moral ideals are noticeably presented in *A Public Enemy*. Dr. Stockman joins a struggle of the strong, honest bourgeois against capitalism. Ibsen cannot see any definite social power which might support the champion of truth in his claim. The essence of Ibsen's political ideal in this play is that one must do one's duty and stand alone to face the whole majority.

In most of Ibsen's production there are some central fields of problems that are examined. These problems become perceptible in various forms, but are often expressions of a basic understanding of capitalist society. One of these fields of problems is liberalism as an ideology. Ibsen connected to the liberal utopia, the ideals of 1789, that to his generation become alive again in 1848. He exposes that capitalist or bourgeois society is unable to achieve the proclaimed liberty, equality and fraternity. The central conflict is the vacillation of liberalism between adjustment to practical politics and the maintenance of the utopia. Central to liberal thought is the concept of the free and autonomous

individual. Ibsen examined the problem of individualism over and over again. Several dramas centered on the relationship between the individual and the others, and whether the individual had the right to put himself above social and moral norms.

A second field of problems is how the bourgeois family as an institution is full of conflicts and also creates conflicts. The family is, in Ibsen's plays, something people enter into after having abandoned their happiness, or they enter blinded with the illusion that the family is a place of happiness. The bourgeois individuals sell their love in favour of a marriage without love, but with economical advantages. And all the parties suffer from this trade. The family kills happiness; it is an institution that prevents emotional fulfillment. Husband, wife and children were victims.

The family is also a place where power is executed, where all relations appear as fight for power and domination. The weak women suffer, and the weakest party, the children, is sacrificed. At the outset of the dramas the family appears as isolated from society. It seems that Ibsen stuck to the myth about the family as a place for emotional intimacy and commitment. However, conflicts are drawn into the scene. They appear through relationships between family members. They enter as demands from society outside the family. The conflicts could not be locked out, and the myth about isolated happiness in the family breaks down under the pressure from a society where there is no happiness. The breakdown comes in relationships with the economy and politics. The family is interconnected with these institutions in society.

Women suffer more than men under these circumstances, but they carry a vision about freedom and another kind of life. According to Ibsen's moral ideals, women should be strong and independent enough to stand up to an oppressive and patriarchal society; Nora, in *A Doll's House*, abandons not only her husband, but her entire family, in an effort to discover herself and become a liberated woman. It is a strong blow directed to a male-dominated society, by showing not only that a woman could break free from the social handcuffs, but that men are actually quite powerless in the face of a strong woman; Nora's husband, Torvald, is left weeping as she leaves him at the close of the play.

As far as females are concerned, Ibsen lays a great stress upon the emancipation of the individual, especially of female, and the principle of heredity. He relentlessly studies a variety of human relationships: sister and brother, father and son, husband and wife etc. He endeavors to tell the spectators that such relationships are usually based on sentimentalism, on misogyny, on patriarchy, on hypocrisy and lies. He thinks that woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day, which is an exclusively masculine society, with laws framed by men and with judicial system that judges feminine conduct from a masculine point of view. Many of his plays represent damning indictment of the conventional notions that kept females in their place during Ibsen's time. Therefore, in his plays Ibsen criticizes the old corrupted morality of these people who still tied to the conventional thoughts from which they cannot release

themselves. These are the ghosts Ibsen talks about in his *Ghosts*. They live like a deadly virus inside us under their spell and we are unconscious of them.

A third field of problems in Ibsen's dramas is the power of money. Money dominates and determines the relations between people. It poisons the atmosphere in the bourgeois homes. In many dramas money joins husband and wife together; money is an obstacle to happiness and intimacy and leads to death and destruction. The society Ibsen depicts is dominated by economic capital. People exist only as partners on business contracts. All relations are soaked with economy and struggle for power. Love becomes a commodity for trade and friendships could be cynically exploited. Private happiness is in an unsolvable conflict with economic interests.

The core of Ibsen's moral ideals resides in the principle that honesty in facing reality is the first requisite of a decent life. The dark depth of human nature must be explored and scrutinized to be finally illuminated. Life is full of pitfalls, humbugs, hypocrisies, and vague diseases which must be recognized to be avoided and then to be cured. For Ibsen, this must be the moral obligation of the intellectuals in any society. They should have enough courage and faith in the human soul. Man should depend on himself to release himself from the old social and political restrictions through patient endurance and nobler ideals. Man should not expect any type of salvation from without; we alone can help ourselves, and this is a vital point to comprehend Ibsen's plays. Ibsen regards democracy, which is believed to be as a cure-all, as much a failure as any other political form. The intelligent and morally courageous minority is always controlled and led by the tyrannical majority.

In a letter to George Brandes\*, shortly after the Paris Commune, Henrik Ibsen wrote about the State and political liberty:

*The State is the curse of the individual. How has the national strength of Prussia been purchased? By the sinking of the individual in a political and geographical formula... The State must go! Undermine the idea of the State, set up in its place spontaneous action, and the idea that spiritual relationship is the only thing that makes for unity, and you will start the elements of a liberty which will be something worth possessing.*

(Goldman: 1914, 11-12)

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\* George Morris Cohen Brandes (4 February 1842 - 19 February 1927) was a Danish critic and scholar who had great influence on Scandinavian and European literature from the 1870s through the turn of the 20th century. Normally he is seen as the theorist behind "the Modern Break-through" of Scandinavian culture. At the age of 30, Brandes formulated the principles of a new realism and naturalism, condemning hyper-aesthetic writing and fantasy in literature. According to Brandes, literature should be an organ "of the great thoughts of liberty and the progress of humanity." His literary goals were shared by many authors, among them the Norwegian Naturalistic dramatist Henrik Ibsen.

Ibsen abominates every institution which is based on a lie and he regards it as a symbol of injustice. Such issues form the keynote to the significance of his plays, as well as to the psychology of Henrik Ibsen himself. Above all he thunders his fiery indictment against the four deadly sins of modern society:

*the Lie inherent in our social arrangements; Sacrifice and Duty, the twin curses that fetter the spirit of man; the narrow mindedness and pettiness of Provincialism, that stifles all growth; and the lack of Joy and Purpose in Work which turns life into a vale of misery and tears.*

(Goldman: 1914, p.12)

In fact, Ibsen writes of his times, his contemporaries, and the social and political concerns and problems of the day. He is the first dramatist in modern drama who criticizes severely the social and political circumstances of his society. He puts under debate the relationship between sexes, social and political moralities, commercial considerations versus general social considerations, environmental consideration, the individual emancipation etc. In his realistic plays, Ibsen is merciless in his quest to expose all social façade, hypocrisy and pretense. He is an inflexible and destructive dramatist of all false idols and corruption and dynamiter of all social and political deceit and dishonesty. He endeavors to deracinate every stone of the social structure. He is looking for truthfulness and freedom. There is hardly a literary work that has meant so much to women's liberation in practically all cultures all over the world as *A Doll's House*. For him liberty means the spiritual regeneration of humankind. To Ibsen, the word 'Liberty' does not know any limitation or restriction, and whenever man says 'Now I have it,' shows that he has lost it.

### *Symbolic Realism*

Realism is the artistic portrayal of life or reality as it is. It is thus not concerned with idealization, with rendering things as beautiful when they are not, or in any way presenting them in any guise as they are not. Realistic drama is an attempt to recreate life on stage, a movement away from the conventional melodramas and sentimental comedies of the 1700s. It is expressed in theatre through the use of symbolism, character development, stage setting and storyline. Realism also provided and continues to provide a medium through which playwrights can express their views about societal values, attitudes and morals. The artist's function is to report and describe what he sees as accurately and honestly as possible. Thus drama becomes an experience closely impinging on the conscience of the audience. Realism is conceived as a laboratory in which the ills of society, familial problems, and the nature of relationships could be 'objectively' presented for the judgment of impartial observers. One may

venture to say that the Realistic Era\* is the rebellion against romantic idealism. People are more skeptical against society and want to show its faults – they want to show that the world is not perfect.

The playwright Henrik Ibsen initiates the realistic period with plays focus on contemporary, day-to-day themes that skillfully reveal both sides of a conflict through brilliantly capturing psychological detail. Anton Chekhov, in Russia, would bring the form to its stylistic apogee with plays whose even minor characters seem to breathe the air we do and in which the plots and themes are developed primarily between the lines.

From the Greeks to William Shakespeare to the modern theatre, the drama has been addicted to certain dramatic and theatrical means used to stun and awe audiences: stolen letters, half-overheard conversations, whispered conspiracies, twins separated at death, mistaken identities, and ad nauseam. One of Ibsen's most significant contributions to drama is getting rid of all that hokum, forswearing artifices of suspense and giving the spectators real suspense instead. He throws out the kings, queens, princes, princesses and all the courtiers. He throws out the verse, the verbal affectations, tricks and traps, the outsized plots and the outworn plotting. He succeeds in making life express itself in the text and on the stage. None can excel the realism of the characters which Ibsen learned to put on the stage. One sees them walk and stand, one hears them talk, as if they really lived. The dialogue is free from any brilliant artificiality. Beginning his career, Ibsen writes few romantic history verse plays but they find no critical or financial success. He then adopts the craftsmanship of the well-made play and he assimilates the play-formula for his own dramatic purposes. He finds in that dramatic technique the vehicle for his social and political drama.

In all schools of realism objectivity of some kind is a main tenet. The realist, in his most elementary guise, wishes to present reality by allowing characters and events to appear in his work with as little sign of his personal intervention as possible. While he does not deny the imaginative faculty, he often minimizes its importance. Opposing symbolist predilections for an esoteric subject-matter, for perfection of form, and for an elite audience, the realist offers his work as a means of communication among men, dealing with large subjects in a comprehensible way, form subordinated to content. Frequently he upholds a theory of historical or natural determination to explain the objective conditions that control both his characters and himself as writer.

Ibsen added to his social and political realistic plays some symbolic touches to create a dual meaning and an exhaustive and deep rationalization to the dramatic complications and dialogues in his plays. He surpasses realism and enters into the realm of "symbolic realism". He understands symbolism as a

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\* Ibsen was Norwegian but classified in the English Realistic era because he influenced so many writers of that time.

form of art which achieves our desire to come to grips with reality and at the same time transcends it. It gives us the concrete with abstract simultaneously. We need the abstract in order to transcend the boundaries of reality. However, the human being's mind can transcend the boundaries of reality in two ways: by means of symbols – which lead into the domain of abstraction; or by presenting reality as it is, by which it transcends its limitations, develops meaning through its own power and strength, and instigates the pillars for the society of the future. The dramatist typically uses symbols when he is unable to seize the meaning of that particular reality, or when he cannot accept the synthesis to which the development of that reality leads. He then employs symbols when he cannot solve difficult, sometimes insoluble problem. For if thought can easily penetrate reality it does not need to wander forth into the realm of symbolism. This is conditional since drama is a mirror of reality – then clearly using symbolism with a realistic context needs a kind of social consciousness of a given society. In other words, Ibsen never intends to break down his device of the realistic form of writing; yet at the same time, he does not want to safely remain within that form, either. The outcome is his within-revolt to his own writing form. He attains this half escape as he carefully instills symbolic meanings in the very soil of realism. In so doing he seems to surpass the limit of photographic presentations of human reality. It seems in the end that Ibsen in his career tries to leap into the unknown by means of the symbolic device, refusing to be solely satisfied with his previous contrivance.

Plays like *A Doll's House*, *A Public Enemy* and *The Ghosts* are realistic, and they, like all the major plays, are replete with contextual symbolism. In *A Doll's House*, for instance, the title itself symbolizes the dependent and dehumanized role of the wife within traditional middle-class marriages. (The Norwegian-Danish word for doll-*dukke*- can also mean “puppet” or “marionette”. In addition, the entire notion of Norway (cold, legal, male) is contrasted symbolically with Italy (warm, emotional, female).

*A Doll's House* is the second play, after *Brand*, in which Ibsen made use of the kind of symbolism. Later on, he writes ten plays; and with each of them his mastery of symbol increased, growing more detailed, more minute, and more elaborate. In *A Doll's House*, the main features of his method are plainly indicated. In later plays he grows more skillful in his use of the device, but in each case the symbol of the play is some material entity or event, a part of the mechanism of the piece. This entity is introduced early in the action; it is wrought more or less closely into the structure of the play; and its last appearance is the climax. From this point to the end of the play it becomes a chain of results.

Of the conventional symbolism Ibsen's work has no trace. His work gives, first and foremost, a sense of intense reality- of actuality even. It is not till later that a hidden intent is guessed, and when this intention is traced to its source, the symbols discovered are original. Each of them-the pistol, the tarantella, the wild duck, the white horses, and the rotten ship - reveals perfectly that for which it

stands. They originate in Ibsen's imagination, and serve his purpose because they are the concrete images of his thought.

The mechanism of Ibsen's symbols is constructed on the idea that symbols stand, first, for a character of the play; and second for the meaning of the play as a whole. An object or event is used as a central theme or motive of the play. Toward this symbol the ostensible action of the play moves, and from it, it recedes. This object or event-as the tarantella in *A Doll's House* - stands for the character of the play, Nora, whose soul is the stage of the real action of the play; and thus the symbol stands, at last, for the play itself.

Ibsen's use of symbol is altogether distinctive. The symbols are presented in a very everyday ordinary, realistic setting. Everything, that the heroes of Ibsen bespeak, possesses a twofold meaning, that which is realistic and of the everyday ordinary, and that which is symbolic, signifying events and judgments of the spiritual world. This endows something especially remarkable to all Ibsen's dialogues. Ibsen, just like Dostoevsky\*, is interested not so much by the psychology of people, as rather by the problem of spirit. Yet an art-form, which deals with the problem of spirit, cannot be only realistic. The realism of everyday life is transformed into the 'symbolics' of another level of being, of spiritual happenings. And all great artistry contains within itself an element of the symbolic.

From 1885 Ibsen is back in Norway. His behavior gives an impression of a ruthless artist's egoism, but this picture is modified in his four latest plays; *The Master Builder*, *Little Eyolf* (1894), *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896) and *When We Dead Awaken* (1900). These works are regarded as epoch-making art of balance on the edge between realism, symbolism and modernism.

To conclude, Ibsen is the first modern playwright of realism, which results from his courageous revolt to the tradition of romanticism. His symbolic plays must be a crystal of his realistic writing. In such plays, he, again, revolts to his own device, i.e., realism. He revolts to himself, not as completely deriving from the realistic mode but rather implicitly planting symbolic meanings in the very realistic soil. In so doing he seems to surpass the limit of photographic presentations of human reality.

### *Female's Identity vs. the Patriarchal World in A Doll's House*

The actual feminist plays such as *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890) by Henrik Ibsen represent the first signs of the rise of feminism. The plays reflect his social, economical and political views of women's emancipation in his time, his response to the Scandinavian proto-feminist movement, and thus his disagreement over women's identity in domestic space. Contemporary feminist writers (Finney: 1989, Velissariou: 1993, Templeton: 1994) record the ways in

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\* Fyodor Mikhaylovich Dostoyevsky (1821–1881) was a Russian fiction writer, essayist, and philosopher whose works include *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.



which these plays still give us tools to discuss women's status in the domestic space and how this status requires further analysis and debate. Moreover, an examination of staging techniques will reveal that modifications of the feminist space gave a theatrical embodiment to women's identities in the domestic sphere. Although Henrik Ibsen was not a modernist, his complex representation of women led him away from previous staging techniques and forms of characterization in viewing the social and political issues. He was a trigger for theatrical modernism through the realism of his female characters.

Ibsen was one of the main advocates for social revolution. He was notorious for weaving controversial topics into his plays, as well as for including female major characters. He knew very well that society's oppression over women was a prime example of the hamper it placed over every person's potential. Writing about women allowed him to make a universal call, not only to women, but to every sentient being. His plays cried out for the female's identity. In *A Doll's House*, Ibsen portrayed the altruistic nature instilled into women by society, the consequential stunt of their development, and the need for them to find their own voice in a world dominated by men. In this play, Ibsen does a wonderful job of presenting the character of Nora as a person who goes through an awakening about her life. In the beginning, she concerns herself only with being a perfect wife and mother according to the social norms of the time. Later, she realizes that she cannot continue just being her husband's shadow. Eventually, she decides that she has duties to herself that are above of those of being a wife. She confronts the fact that she is not a complete being the way that her husband, society and the church want for her to be.

The story is simply about a nineteenth century ideal family. Nora Helmer is the beloved wife of Torvald Helmer. They have a very nice, comfortable house, three kids and lovely friends. They have been married for eight years. Torvald was just promoted for a higher position in the bank. This is what we see in the beginning of the play. When Torvald started to talk, we can feel that something is wrong with this picture. Through many dramatic complications, Nora discovers that her life is just a bundle of lies and a stretched line of subjection to the masculine power of her husband, family and society which turned her into a mere 'doll'. Finally, she decides to leave everything behind to find her own identity outside, facing life and having her own experience.

Torvald Helmer the handsome, young, successful husband of Nora and whose reputation controls his life and work is one of the main characters in the play. He has always been a good picture of how people are expected to be in the middle class society, and the moral rules he follows are nothing other than those that society enforces on middle class people. For Torvald Helmer as with most of the people of his class, to be worthy is to be in the 'right'. Torvald's job as a bank manager is very dear to him and so far we can say that he has earned his way up. Torvald is an intelligent man, but his intelligence is limited and bound to the social rules around him, we get no sense that he has a vital inner life of which he is aware but at the end of the play, we get the hint that it is starting to grow.

In other words, Torvald's self-image is portrayed by how people think and see him, the way he sees himself is the way others see him and judge him. His opinion of others is wholly determined by how they affect his social position. Torvald's moral codes are derived from society's expectations, meaning that everything he does has to be well calculated before he dares to take one step ahead. In short, he is an ideal representative of the mentality of the nineteenth century patriarchy.

People to Torvald are classified differently according to their importance to him and their social context. A perfect example of that is how he treats Mrs. Linde and Krogstad. In the case of the first, Torvald treats Mrs. Linde carelessly as she has no significance to him what so ever. When Nora asks him to find a job for Mrs. Linde, he replies grimly, "Ah! Well, it's very likely I may be able to find something for you." ( Act I, 18) But in Krogstad's situation, he treats him very badly and he wants him gone out of the bank as Krogstad's conversations with him are too embarrassing for his new position as a bank manager. Torvald tells Nora,

*But I know him when we were boys. It was one of those rash friendships that so often prove an incubus in after life. I may as well tell you plainly, we were once on very intimate terms with one another. But this tactless fellow lays no restraint on himself when other people are present. On the contrary, he thinks it gives him the right to adopt a familiar tone with me, and every minute it is "I say, old fellow!" and that sort of thing. I assure you it is extremely painful to me. He would make my position in the Bank intolerable.*  
(Act II, 35)

How Torvald thinks of himself is very bound to how people think and expect out of him that nothing else matters.

Nora is a fragile character and she relies on Torvald for her identity. This reliance had kept her from having her own individuality. Yet when it is discovered that Nora only plays the part of the good typical housewife who stays at home to please her husband, it is then understandable that she is living not for herself but to please others. From early childhood, Nora has always held the opinions of either her father or Torvald, hoping to please them. She considers herself fortunate. Indeed, she worships her husband, believes in him unreservedly, and she is sure that if ever her safety should be mentioned, Torvald, her idol, her god, would perform the miracle. This mentality makes her childish, showing that she has no ambitions of her own. Because she had been pampered all of her life, first by her father and now by Torvald, she tells her husband,

*I mean that I was simply transferred from papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything according to your own taste, and so I got the same tastes as you –*

*or else I pretended to, I am really not quite sure which – I think sometimes the one and sometimes the other. When I look back on it, it seems to me as I had been living here like a poor woman – just from hand to mouth. I have existed merely to perform tricks for you, Torvald.*

(Act III, 63)

It is obvious that the influence Nora's father had on her was impacting because of his imposing male authority over an innocent female whom he "toys" with as a doll that developed into the image that her father expected of her following the societal prejudiced values.

Torvald wrongly thinks that Nora is stupid, and must be controlled. He controls her housekeeping budget and how much she can spend on certain purchases. He does not know, and he does not want to know that Nora, herself, can earn some money. Instead, he expects her always be dependent on his salary. Nevertheless, the matter is different; Nora did many things throughout her married life that were regarded as sins by the masculine society she was living in. It is an exclusively male society with laws drafted by men, and with counsel and judges who judge feminine conduct from the male point of view. The first sin was that when Nora worked secretly to help her husband financially. At that time, woman was not allowed to work without her husband's consent. She reveals her secret to her friend Christine:

*Well, then I have found other ways of earning money. Last winter I was lucky enough to get a lot of copying to do; so I locked myself up and sat writing every evening until quite late at night. Many a time I was desperately tired; but all the same it was a tremendous pleasure to sit there working and earning money. It was like being a man.*

(Act I, 14)

The second sin was that she had borrowed 250 pounds from Nils Krogstad by forging her father's signature. She spent the money to save her husband's life. She thought that her love for father and husband would justify her crime, forgery. In fact, Nora could not take out the loan herself because she was a woman and only men could take out loans; woman could only take out a loan if she had the consent of a husband or a father. Nora was afraid that if Torvald knew that she had taken initiative to borrow money to help him, it would be "painful and humiliating" for him.

*Mrs. Linde: And since then have you never told your secret to your husband?*

*Nora: Good Heavens, no! How could you think so? A man who has such strong opinions about these things! And besides, how painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald with his manly independence, to*

*know that he owed me anything! It would upset our mutual relations altogether; our beautiful happy home would no longer be what it is now. ( Act I, 13 )*

Nora hides the fact that she has done something illegal from Torvald. She is given the opportunity to tell him and maybe get his support or advice on the situation, and she lies to him to hide the truth. These lies are followed by a third one in which she becomes the victim of two masculine powers. When Torvald becomes manager of the bank in which Krogstad is employed, and threatens the man with dismissal, Krogstad naturally fights back. He asks Nora to help him, "Mrs. Helmer, you will be so good as to use your influence on my behalf." (Act I, 21) When she refuses to submit to his demand, he threatens her, "if I lose my position a second time, you shall lose yours with me." (Act I, 25) Later, she tells her husband that the reason she does not want Torvald to fire Krogstad is that "this fellow writes in the most scurrilous newspapers...He can do [Torvald] an unspeakable amount of harm. I am frightened to death of him." (Act II, 34) Torvald does not know that if he fires Krogstad, the consequences will affect his whole life. The fourth lie is that Nora hides her own potency of revolution from her husband until the end of the play. She always plays the role that she has accustomed to, being the doll. She does not show any sign of dissatisfaction or uprising to Torvald. When she finds the appropriate moment to rebel, she leaves everything behind and slams the door.

Ibsen sets up Act I by first introducing us to the central issue: Nora and her relation to the outdoor world (Nora entering with her packages). She serves as a symbol for women of the time; women who were thought to be content with the comfort of modern society with no thought or care of the world in which they lived. She appears childlike and coquettish. She orders Helene in an excitable tone to hide the Christmas tree as the children "mustn't see it till tonight." (Act I, 3) Nora's secretiveness in attempting to hide the tree, extends further, and is a constant theme. As the play reveals, Nora does delight in material wealth, having been labeled a 'spendthrift' from an early age. She projects the attitude that money is the key to happiness.

*Mrs. Linde: (smiling)      Nora, Nora, haven't you learnt sense yet? In our schooldays you were a great spendthrift.*

*Nora: (laughing)    yes, that is what Torvald says now.*

*(Act I, 9)*

One of Torvald's fatal masculine faults that he fails in scrutinizing Nora's depth and her psychology adequately. He treats her as a pet using animal images and phrases in addressing her. The masculine pride and selfishness inside the Victorian male prevents him from understanding what the wife actually needs and expects from her husband rather than shelter, food, children and sex. Torvald, referring to Nora, asks, "Is that my little lark twittering out there?" (Act I,3). Nora replies to him "Yes, it is" (Act I, 4), running up to Torvald like a

puppy. It is evident that Nora is a cheerful woman, always wants to please her husband in order to get money from him. In addition, Torvald thinks that she is his spoiled bird. After Calling Nora 'a lark', Torvald, in contrast, calls her "Is that my squirrel rustling?" (Act I, 4). He calls her 'a squirrel' because he knows she hides something from him. She hides away the bag of macaroons from him. She willingly accepts Torvald comparing her with a little animal and even seems to identify with this image, "You haven't any idea how many expenses we skylarks and squirrels have, Torvald." (Act I, 6) Nora appears completely submitted to her husband, ready to accept whatever he would say or do. Torvald scolded her as if she were a child, "Hasn't Mrs. Sweet Tooth been breaking rules today in town..." (Act I, 6). Then, Nora would respond as a young child who would face punishment, "I shouldn't think of going against your wishes." (Act I, 6) Their relationship consists of nothing truly real. Everything is fun and games and for show. This type of communications cannot be healthy in any relationship, and greatly held up the relationship between the two. Finally, when Nora realizes that they need to seriously converse the timing is too late, "We have been married now eight years. Does it not occur to you that this is the first time that we two, you and I, husband and wife, have had a serious conversation?" (Act III, 62-63) This lack of seriousness and practicality in their relationship will be one of the central factors of their separation.

The external factors in the play have a significant dramatic role in constructing the characters' catastrophe. One of the main turning points in Nora's life is Christine's visit, Nora's friend. Christine gives the reader an initial impression of Nora's opposite. Christine Linde is a pale, worn woman who is completely independent. Her conversation with Nora reveals that Christine was left poor and alone after her husband, for whom she did not care, passed away. Christine accepted to stay with her husband because she reasoned her present situation would leave her no other option. She felt she had to take care of her two brothers and bedridden mother. If she had not married this wealthy man, she would have had her freedom, but it would have been a difficult struggle. Instead, she surrendered her freedom for an easier life. Eight years later, the death of her husband gave her enough of a jolt to set her back in control of her own life. Christine represents the initial impulse that pushed Nora ahead in her metamorphosis. She is the first character who recognizes that Nora's marriage is built on lies. Furthermore, the spectators may see in Christine Nora's future destiny of a rebellious woman against all social conventions towards finding her female identity. Still there is a hope for Christine to renew her old relationship with Krogstad after her tragic failure in life as Nora may return to Torvald to begin a new life in the future.

The second crucial turning point in Nora's life is that when Torvald decides to dismiss Krogstad from the bank, Krogstad told Nora that she either had to get him his job back or that he was going to tell Torvald about the loan and forgery. Nora is terrified and she begs him not to do it for the sake of her children:

Nora: *show it, then; think of my little children.*

Krogstad: *Have you and your husband thought of mine?*  
(Act II, 42)

The second spark of her metamorphosis starts when Krogstad tells her that he is going to destroy her husband by this letter and he and nobody else will be the new manager. Nora replies,

Nora: *That's a thing you will never see!*

Krogstad: *Do you mean that you will -?*

Nora: *I have courage enough for it now.*

Krogstad: *Oh, you can't frighten me. A fine, spoilt lady like you -*

Nora: *You will see, you will see.* (Act II, 43)

Nora's confrontation to Krogstad refers to the fact that she begins to discover her own identity as a female, no more weakness or subjection or servitude of any kind to any one, even if this one is the family itself. She has the same quantity of courage Krogstad has now in defending his job and family. "I have courage enough for it now" refers in fact to her potential as a new woman who should restore her self-defence against those intruders, tyrants and oppressors.

Krogstad leaves the house and Nora's eyes follow him. She goes to the hall door, opens it slightly and sees Krogstad drop the letter into the box. Nora utters a stifled cry, and runs across the room to the table by the sofa. She whispers with herself, "In the letter-box. (*Steals across the hall door.*) There it lies – Torvald, Torvald, there is no hope for us now!" (Act II, 44) Before Torvald confronts her with the letter, Nora is on her way to commit suicide, determined that Torvald should not have to sacrifice his life for her. In this way, they have an equal relationship. However, she is tremendously disappointed to discover that he clearly does not intend to sacrifice himself for her.

When Torvald reads the letter he knows the secret of the loan, he gets angry accusing Nora of ruining his life, telling her that she will no longer be able to see her children or maintain their marriage except in public appearances. "You will still remain in my house, that is a matter of course. But I shall not allow you to bring up the children; I dare not trust them to you." (Act III, 60) Nora even asks him whether he would give his life for her and her fears are confirmed when he answers that he would never sacrifice his honor for a loved one.

Nora recognizes how egocentric her husband is after he reads Krogstad's letter. He rewards Nora for her sacrifice to save his health by accusing her of being a very bad wife:

*What a horrible awakening! All these eight years –  
she who was my joy and pride – a hypocrite, a liar –  
worse, worse – a criminal! The unutterable ugliness*

*of it all! – For shame! For shame!...all your father's  
want of principle has come out in you. No religion, no  
morality, no sense of duty.* (Act III, 59-60)

The accumulation of Nora's recognition increases the tension of action. She asks her angry husband, "Let me go. You shall not suffer for my sake. You shall not take it upon yourself." (Act III, 59) Torvald sees no use of this since his reputation will be destroyed. He tells his wife, "Do you understand what you have done? Answer me! Do you understand what you have done?" (Act III, 59) She replies, "Yes, now I am beginning to understand thoroughly." (Act III, 59) When Krogstad's second letter comes in which he promises not to show them up or to accuse them lawfully, Torvald gets happy crying,

*Nora! No, I must read it once again -, yes, it is true! I  
am saved! Nora, I am saved!*

Nora: *And I?*

Helmer: *You too, of course...* (Act III, 61)

When Torvald realizes that neither his pride nor his social reputation will be touched, the first sentence he utters is, "I am saved." Not 'you are saved', or 'We are saved', since the priority is for the male to be saved first. Nora feels that she has spent her life with an alien. Her recognition of the self illuminates her way to discover her authentic female identity which in turn will shape and decide her real relationship with her husband and with the outer world. She is now able to become an independent human being and not just an elegant doll. She gets a lesson that Christine has learned fully. Therefore, Nora must educate and support herself in facing the outer world as well.

Even the term 'freedom' in *A Doll's House* takes various connotations and denotations. For instance, Nora's understanding of the meaning of freedom evolves throughout the play. In the first act, she believes that she will be totally "free" as soon as she has repaid her debt, because she will have the opportunity to devote herself fully to her domestic responsibilities. She says:

*My goodness, it's delightful to think of, Christine!  
Free from care! To be able to be free from care, quite  
free from care; to be able to play and romp with the  
children; to be able to keep the house beautifully and  
have everything just as Torvald likes it!* (Act I, 15)

After Krogstad blackmails her, however, she reconsiders her conception of freedom and questions whether she is happy in Torvald's house, subjected to his orders and edicts.

*We have been married now eight years. Does it not  
occur to you that this is the first time we two, you and  
I, husband and wife, have had a serious conversation?*

(Act III, 63)

By the end of the play, Nora seeks a new kind of freedom. She wishes to be relieved of her familial obligations in order to follow her own ambitions, beliefs, and identity.

Nora finally succeeds in diagnosing her relationship with her husband and consequently resolves to leave him. She believes that true marriage is impossible between them because neither of them loves the other, or is even capable of doing so. Nora says, "You have never loved me. You have only thought it pleasant to be in love with me." (Act III, 63) Nora realizes that, before she can be a wife, she must first discover herself through venturing out into the world.

*Helmer: Before all else, you are a wife and a mother.*

*Nora: I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as are – or, at all events, that I must try and become one. I know quite well, Torvald, that most people would think you right, and that views of that kind are to be found in books; but I can no longer content myself with what most people say, or with what is found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them.*

(Act III, 65)

When Nora closed behind her the door of her doll's house, she made the correct choice and opened wide the gate of life for woman. (Goldman: 1914, 45) She would start her life as Christine had done and Torvald would continue his life without change - for he valued honor above the love of Nora. Only perfect freedom of having one's identity and communion can make a true bond between man and woman.

Finally, Ibsen uses symbols to enhance the main social ideas he criticizes in his plays. For instance, he uses the Tarantella dance as a symbol to present Nora's attempts to express or to announce herself and her will of emancipation. This dance is often said to be a dance simulating the furious whirling movement of those who have been bitten by the deadly tarantula spider: it is at one and the same time a frenzied activity and a symptom of death. It goes from an already quick tempo to an even quicker one, while alternating between major and minor keys. It is characterized by fast movements, foot tapping, and on the women's part, exaggerated ruffling of petticoats. It involves a lot of very fast spinning and jumping until one cannot dance anymore and is so exhausted that they fall to the ground. It is in constant uncertainty, like Nora's character.

The tarantella serves as her last chance to be Torvald's doll, to dance and amuse him and to distract him from reading the letter. But at the same time the dance summarizes Nora's tragic life with its delight, joy and happiness on the surface, but it hides underneath a dreadful secret. It is the culmination of Nora's doll life. Her heart, bosom and veins are full of poison, therefore, she has to



dance and dance violently to jump over the barrier of time and space, the wall of fear and deception towards discovering her own salvation, liberation and identity.

Nora: *Now play for me! I am going to dance!*

Helmer: *(as he plays) Slower, slower!*

Nora: *I can't do it any other way.*

Helmer: *Not so violently, Nora!*

Nora: *This is the way.* (Act II, 47)

The dance is over. Torvald still feels that Nora must respond to his own desires. He is sexually excited by her dance and he asks her to go to bed with him,

*When I watched the seductive figures of the Tarantella, my blood was on fire; I could endure it no longer, and that was why I brought you down so early—*

(Act III, 55)

Torvald is more interested in Nora physically than emotionally. When Nora responds to his demand by saying, “Go away, Torvald! Leave me alone. I don’t want all this” (Act III, 55), Torvald asks, “Aren’t I your husband?” (Act III, 56). By saying this, he is implying that one of Nora’s duties, as his wife, is to physically please him at his command.

In conclusion, Nora is a victim of the masculine society. Ever since Eve tempted Adam\*, women have been detested in many ways and for many overt reasons around the world and in various cultures. They are hated and feared for their bodies, which tempt men to give into their “base” instincts; they are feared and considered “unclean” because of their monthly cycle of bleeding; they are hated for their unique feminine abilities, which are invariably considered malicious - or worse, evil - by the misogynist individual or culture. Nora is no exception. She has been treated by her husband according to this male criterion. She rebels against this masculine tyranny but she has to sacrifice something very precious so as to get her freedom and identity, to leave her children, her husband and the whole family. She tries to prove that females can be equal to the male in everything and autonomous in their own identities.

### *The Female Quest for Power in Hedda Gabler*

Like conflict, power is a social phenomenon that we encounter every day in our lives. “Power is everywhere.” (Foucault: 1978, 334) Many of our social relationships can be characterized as relations of power: employer and

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\* Any religious parable mentioned in this dissertation is either quoted or paraphrased from the Bible.

employee, teacher and student, parent and child, and so on. Power has been the focus of study and concern across all social science disciplines. Yet, as with conflict, many questions remain unanswered.

Hedda, the famous daughter of General Gabler, married George Tesman out of desperation, but she found life with him to be dull and tedious. During their wedding trip, her husband spent most of his time in libraries doing research in history for a book that is soon to be published. He is hoping to receive a position in the university. Thea Elvsted, an old friend of Hedda's, comes to visit her and tells her of Ejlert Lövborg, an old friend of both women. Ejlert Lövborg, under the guidance of Thea Elvsted, has written two books - the first, a general history of society, has been successful; the second, a meditation on the future, exists only in manuscript but promises to make a considerable stir when it is published. Complications unfold when we learn that Hedda herself has had an earlier relationship with Lövborg, which broke up when she threatened to shoot him. It seems that she did so because, for her, Lövborg had in some undisclosed fashion begun to ask too much of the relationship. Since that time, Lövborg's life has taken another turn. In the past, however, he has lived a life of degeneration. Now he has quit drinking and has devoted himself to serious work.

Hedda's multifarious feelings about the relationship between Thea and Lövborg fuel the action of the play. To what extent her obvious belief that Lövborg should be liberated from the restrictions of his relationship with Thea is a rationalization of her jealousy it is not easy to discern, but at any rate, she so works upon him that he goes to a bachelor party given by Brack and gets drunk once again. The consequence is that he loses the manuscript, which by this time has acquired an intense emotional value for all concerned - they have come to think of it, in fact, as a child. When the manuscript comes into Hedda's possession, via Tesman (who found it by the roadside), she burns it; and when the distraught Lövborg (who knows only that he has lost the 'child') returns to her house, she encourages his thoughts of suicide - and puts into his hands one of her father's pistols. Lövborg makes his way back to the rooms of 'Mademoiselle Diana', where he believes the manuscript was stolen from him, and in a wild scene (reported to Hedda by Judge Brack) the pistol goes off and Lövborg is killed. Brack attempts to use these circumstances to play upon Hedda's fear of scandal and so to blackmail her into a liaison. But in the dénouement, while Thea and Tesman are beginning to try to reconstruct Lövborg's manuscript from the notes which Thea kept, Hedda shoots herself in the temple.

R. V. Sampson, in his psychoanalytic assessment of power, notes that a human being "may seek to order his life and his relations with others on the basis of love or on the basis of power." (Sampson: 1966, 1) According to Sampson the human being cannot develop in both directions - a choice, whether conscious or unconscious, between power and love must be made. Should the force of power prevail in an individual, all subsequent human relationships will be characterized by domination and subjection. John Stuart Mill's

comprehension of the extensive problems inherent in the sexual relationship is indeed profound. He states:

*That the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes - the legal subordination of one sex to the other - is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other.*

(Mill: 1991, 471)

Mill believes that a female desire for power is a psychic consequence of the domination / submission model of marriage. He notes:

*An active and energetic mind, if denied liberty, will seek for power: refused the command of itself, it will assert its personality by attempting to control others. To allow to any human beings no existence of their own but what depends on others, is giving far too high a premium on bending others to their purposes. Where liberty cannot be hoped for, and power can, power becomes the grand object of human desire.*

(Mill: 1991, 578)

In *Hedda Gabler*, Henrik Ibsen shared Mill his dissatisfaction with the nineteenth century model of marriage, employing his social drama to elaborate and illuminate the profound consequences of the traditional marriage. Eva Le Gallienne writes:

*The theme... that interested Ibsen most was... that of the different ethical codes by which men and women live. ...Ibsen was accused of being an enemy to the "sacred ties of marriage." People could not understand that he believed it must be based on spiritual communion - mere "living together" was not enough. He felt that a man and a woman should, ideally, go through life together as perfect equals, in perfect honesty, free to develop - each in his own way into a complete human entity. (Le Gallienne: 1981, xiv-v)*

Indeed Ibsen's notebooks resounds with passages such as:

*There are two kinds of spiritual law, two kinds of conscience, one in man and another, altogether different, in woman. They do not understand each other; but in practical life the woman is judged by man's law, as though she were not a woman but a man. The wife in the play ends by having no idea of what is right or wrong; natural feeling on the one hand and belief in authority on the other have*

*altogether bewildered her. A woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day, which is an exclusively masculine society, with laws framed by men and with a judicial system that judges feminine conduct from a masculine point of view.*

(Ibsen: 1978, 91)

Hedda Gabler holds the power over everything from start to finish. In seeking the source of Hedda's unquenchable desire for power, one must look not to the atmosphere of her marriage, but rather, to the atmosphere in which she was brought up. The title itself represents the precise social theme of the drama. Henrik Ibsen, using the name Hedda Gabler,\* despite her marriage to George Tesman, has conveyed to the reader the importance of social class. Hedda prefers to identify herself as the daughter of General Gabler, not the wife of George Tesman.

The play opens to a set which is presided over by the portrait of "a handsome, elderly man in a general's uniform." (Act I, 263) Nada Zeinneh makes the point that this "visual effect" is most effective in that it maintains "the centrality of the father and his domineering influence on Hedda. In fact, the portrait exists as representative of the long dead General Gabler as an actual presence in the play. His presence is as real as Hedda's own and, in fact, more real than the presence of Hedda's distracted husband. He lives in his portrait and in his pistols and, most profoundly, in Hedda's dissatisfaction and self-loathing.

Hedda's mother is conspicuous by her absence. While General Gabler's portrait presides over every scene in the play and he is mentioned frequently, Mrs. Gabler receives not one mention. Though we assume that she died in childbirth or shortly thereafter, there is nothing concrete to lead us to this conclusion. Perhaps she died as Hedda will- by her own hand, perhaps not. Perhaps she merely exemplifies Ibsen's concern with nineteenth century mothers as reflected in his notes for *A Doll House*, "A mother in modern society [is] like certain insects who go away and die when she has done her duty in the propagation of the race." (Ibsen: 1978, 91) In any event, we have no information regarding her existence: she is a non-entity. From her non-presence, we can deduce that she provides no gender role model for her daughter.

Of General Gabler, we are told much. He was a general in the army, from which we can conclude a love of law and order, an adherence to the ideology of the patriarchy, a belief in the power of authority and brute force. Furthermore, we understand that while he lived he held a highly respectable position in society. Like Torvald Helmer in *A Doll's House*, he enjoyed the power accorded to the upper middle class male by virtue of his gender, social position, and wealth. As his only child, Hedda has access to this power and learns to value it above all

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\* The name of 'Hedda' means warrior.

else. Instead of preparing his daughter for wifehood or motherhood, her father raises her as he might raise a son. He teaches her what he knows: to ride and shoot like a man. We further sense that within his techniques is the lesson that, since there is no access to power for the female, all things female are worthless. Because of her unique upbringing, Hedda cannot identify with the female world, which has been misrepresented to her, and is forced to identify only with a world in which she can never belong. She therefore develops a masculine gender identity, which leads her to a profound self-hatred. Ibsen hints at this in his notes where he says of Hedda, “she wants to lead a man’s life.” The result is that she subscribes to a kind of female misogyny – she cannot help but loathe her very existence. Therefore, she grows to adulthood, believing in her heart that the only thing worth having is power – male power. Zein nedine shrewdly observes that “womanhood to Hedda is an ugly reality; manhood a beautiful ideal.”

Hedda does not find a man who can compensate for her father’s failure to provide care and attention. On the other hand, she is not the kind of person who can open up easily to anybody and accept guidance; she is a person who has to keep everything under control, like a general. She is the one who wants to have an influence on other people’s lives. She wants to face the other with reality instead of facing reality themselves. This is why she is her father’s daughter. She embodies the strict and closed attitudes of her soldier father, who is unable to make any kind of compromise. She lives in a military dream world filled with heroes and men who are able to control the world and their desires.

Jorgen Tesman’s upbringing has been vastly different from Hedda’s. Where she has been raised by a domineering and authoritative male, Jorgen has been raised by two maiden aunts and their devoted female servant in a home where love, rather than power, was the ruling principle. The aunts, significantly, have never married and therefore have no experience in the power politics involved in the nineteenth century domination / submission model of marriage. From the aunts, Jorgen learned to place value on love and to gain satisfaction from pleasing the people who love him. One senses that even his profession was chosen to gratify his aunts’ expectations of him. Since he has been raised in a female household where no value has been placed on power, Jorgen has little understanding of it. He concerns himself at least as much with other people’s happiness as with his own – as Hedda points out “with touch of scorn,” “My husband’s always worrying about what one’s going to live on.” (Act I, 292) Indeed, though most critics dismiss Tesman as ridiculous, the perception of him as such is more because we see him through Hedda’s scorn than because of anything concrete. Even the perpetual questions contained in his dialogue – the ubiquitous “hm?” and “uh?” – indicate a willingness to please in that he does not expect unanimous agreement as General Gabler no doubt would have.\*

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\* Stein Haugom Olsen notes that “What is remarkable about Hedda Gabler,...is that in this play Ibsen calls into question the familiar Ibsenite values of lust of life, courage, defiance, and sublimity. In *Hedda Gabler*, these qualities are indistinguishable from Lovborg’s dissipation and debauchery, and Hedda’s cowardice, insensibility, and contempt. At the same time, society is much more benign in *Hedda*

Comparatively speaking, Hedda is a product of a marriage marked by domination and submission – a marriage not unlike the Helmers' in *A Doll's House* and the Alving's in the *Ghosts*. Hedda is the fruition of the unhealthy sexual relationships shown in *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*. Michael Meyer, Ibsen's biographer, notes that,

*...the idea of creating such a character [Hedda] had [long] been at the back of Ibsen's mind..., for his rough notes for Rosmelsholm in 1886 contain a sketch of a girl, intended as Rosmer's elder daughter (though he finally decided not to include her in the play), who "is in danger of succumbing to inactivity and loneliness. She has rich talents which are lying unused.*

(Meyer: 1971, 648)

Hedda is selfish and spoiled, and she is more interested in flirting with Judge Brack. She seems to gain pleasure from exercising power over others. Hedda cannot fit herself into a confined or stereotyped social role, that of the loving wife and mother. Thus, the play centers on the conflict between self-indulgence and self-control, between willfulness and duty, between power and submission. She confides to Judge Brack, "Oh, be quiet, I tell you! It often seems to me that I've only got a gift for one thing in the world." (Act II, 307) This gift, in fact, plants in Hedda's nature a kind of aggressiveness and violence before and after marriage. Much like the opening scene of *A Doll's House* where the power politics of the marriage is illuminated, the opening scene of *Hedda Gabler* offers telling insight into the motivations of the central character and her marriage. Though Hedda has arrived home only very late the previous evening, already the maid expresses distress that she may not be to her new mistress's liking. Furthermore, Hedda has told her that Jorgen must be referred to as "Doctor Tesman" at all times though Berte has known Jorgen since his childhood. We sense from the exchange that Hedda treats Berte merely as a paid servant, not as the Tesmans perceive her, which is as a beloved family retainer. In her relationship with Berte, there is no question of who holds the power as Berte is the servant and Hedda is the mistress. Hedda has no need to be polite to her, nor to manipulate her into doing her will since she is responsible for Berte's livelihood and will therefore treat her as such.

To Hedda, Aunt Juliana is a different matter. As an older member of the family into which Hedda has married (and, since she raised Hedda's husband,

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*Gabler* than in other plays by Ibsen dealing with these themes. The immediate reaction of the reader with his Ibsen – specs on is to mumble that Tesman is weak and insignificant, and to accept Hedda's judgment of him. But Hedda's judgment must be balanced by a proper appreciation of Tesman's virtues and of the tesmanesque background against which Hedda acts... Tesman provides the background necessary to perceive the artistic point of Hedda's status, values, and attitudes." (Olsen:1985, 609-610)

she is, in effect, Hedda's mother-in-law), Aunt Juliana, within Hedda's skewed vision, may consider herself in a position of power over Hedda. Thus, within this relationship, Hedda must establish her power position immediately. To this end, she removes all feminine touches to widow Falk's villa – the touches that she would assume are the work of Aunt Juliana – the slipcovers on the furniture are removed, as are the abundant flowers that decorate the room. Additionally, we learn that though Aunt Juliana had made the trip to meet them at the pier on the previous evening, Hedda had refused to allow her to ride home on the pretext that her luggage required the space that Aunt Juliana would have occupied. That the luggage could have been sent separately is unquestionable – Hedda's motive was to establish herself in the position of power over Aunt Juliana distantly and points out the earliness of her call – a comment which effectively conveys to Tesman's aunt that she must not consider Hedda's house her second home. Immediately after greeting the aunt, Hedda expresses anger at the maid for leaving the door open. We suspect that Hedda knows full well that Aunt Juliana has opened the glass door to let in some fresh air and sunlight. The message is that she will not allow such familiarity in her home. Aunt Juliana responds by conceding to Hedda and volunteering to close the door. But this is not the response Hedda expected and her reply indicates an alarm that the situation does not warrant, "Oh, no don't do that, please. (To Tesman) Just draw the blinds, my dear, will you? That gives a softer light." (Act I, 273).

Hedda perhaps had expected Aunt Juliana to become argumentative and the power struggle could escalate until Hedda proved victorious. But Aunt Juliana has no understanding of this power competition and her concession to Hedda's will makes Hedda look petty and nitpicking. Hedda follows with a comment that the room is in need of fresh air with "All these precious flowers!" (Act I, 273), though she is well aware that many of the flowers are gifts from Tesman's aunts. Though Hedda's cut is followed by an invitation to sit, Aunt Juliana senses Hedda's insincerity and makes ready to leave.

Though momentarily victorious in her power play, Hedda's strategy is thwarted when Juliana distracts Tesman with her gift of love – his old bedroom slippers embroidered by his invalid aunt. To Hedda, the slippers are a reminder of the debt that Tesman owes his aunts and she misinterprets the action as a power strategy on the part of Aunt Juliana – if Tesman is indebted to his aunts, then she is also. Hedda counters by humiliating Tesman's aunt; we are given an early indication of Hedda's hostility to the world in which she finds herself when, on an impulse, she speaks slightly of a hat which she knows to be Aunt Juliana's, but which she pretends to believe is 'the maid's'. That she knew the hat to be Aunt Juliane's is revealed to us through a subsequent passage of dialogue between Hedda and Judge Brack.

In an attempt to lessen the tension caused by Hedda's intentional blunder, Tesman asks his aunt to comment on the change in Hedda's physical appearance – a clear suggestion of her initial pregnancy.

*Tesman: Yes, isn't it? But, aunt Julle, take a good look at Hedda before you go. See how nice and charming she is.*

*Miss Tesman: Ah, my dear, there's nothing new in that. Hedda has been lovely all her life.*

*Tesman: Yes, but have you noticed how plump she's grown, and how well she is? How much she's filled out on our travels?*

(Act I, 275)

Aunt Juliana is not only placated, but overjoyed and attempts to embrace Hedda in a congratulatory sign. Hedda is furious at Tesman and at his aunt for presuming such familiarity – especially after she has worked so hard to establish her position of greater power. She replies aggressively, “I am exactly the same as I was when I went away.” (Act I, 275) Hedda cannot understand that Tesman’s aunt will put aside all of Hedda’s caustic remarks to please her nephew – she understands Aunt Juliana’s gesture only as an attempt to gain a powerhold. Further, what she infers to be Tesman’s objectifications of her as vessel for his progeny removes her from any power regardless of the situation. Aunt Juliana’s infantilizing gesture only adds fuel to the fire of her fury which is indicated by her struggle to free herself from the embrace and by her actions when her husband and his aunt leave the room. “Hedda crosses the room, raising her arms and clenching her hands, as if in fury. Then she pulls back the curtains from the glass door and stands there looking out.” (Act I, 276)

Mrs. Thea Elvsted, a younger colleague of Hedda’s during her schooldays, is another different matter to Hedda. She wants information from her and will therefore treat her with kid gloves until she is no longer needed, after which she will cast her to the wind. Her desire for power over every individual she meets is so great and so longstanding that she is able to see almost instantly which tactic will work to gain the most power in any given situation. She manipulates each situation toward this end. She senses immediately that Thea Elvsted is unused to kindness and will be easily manipulated by even the most scantily show of it. Thus, when Thea enters the scene, all anxious concern just below the surface, Hedda makes much of her, “going to meet her in a friendly way,” and complimenting her on her gift of flowers. She “pulls Mrs. Elvsted down on to the sofa and sits beside her.” (Act I, 279); kisses her cheek, and insists on being called by her first name. She strokes Thea’s hands, gradually drawing her out and procuring the necessary information. All of her actions are, in stark contrast to her meeting, only moments before, with Tesman’s aunt. In fact, while her exchange with her new relative is inappropriately cold and distant, her exchange with a woman she barely knows is inappropriately familiar. The two exchanges work well side by side to illustrate Hedda’s resourcefulness in the power game: she will behave in



whatever manner the situation warrants to gain complete power in the situation. By the time Thea leaves, she believes she has gained a new friend and ally; she has rather put herself into the complete power of Hedda Gabler. Like the Tesman family, Thea Elvsted is an easy mark for Hedda. While it seems that Thea has suffered great oppression throughout her marriage to Sheriff Elvsted (ironically, each of Ibsen's tyrants carry a title), she appears, like Nora Helmer, to have transcended the power trap that Mrs. Alving and Hedda fall into. Further, in a move not unlike Nora, Thea leaves her marriage to pursue not power, but self-realization in the form of Lövborg – a man who has succeeded in turning her into “a human being.” Again, the similarity to Nora is striking: Nora, as she takes leave of the dollhouse upon which she has built her life, tells her husband, “I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are – or, at all events, that I must try and become one.” (Act III, 65) As self-realized human being, Thea places value not upon the procurement of power, but rather upon the procurement of love. Ironically, through her love for Lövborg, Thea also gains power over him, a power which he readily admits and which Hedda so envies.

A good deal of our sense of the play's direction is produced by the interplay between these two female characters: Hedda and Thea. Thea's desire for motherhood, her complete devotion to men, and even her beautiful hair enrage Hedda. But what angers Hedda more is that Thea is in the same situation as she is and escapes, while Hedda cannot break free. Hedda sees Thea as odious and inferior to herself, yet Thea achieves things that Hedda cannot. Hedda desires intellectual creativity, not just the procreative power that combines her to a limited social function. But because her only means of exercising power is through a credulous husband, Hedda envies Thea's rich intellectual partnership with Lövborg, which produces as their creative “child” a bold treatise on the future of society. Hedda's rivalry with Thea for power over Lövborg is a conflict between Hedda's dominating intellect (symbolized by her pistols) and the traditionally feminine power of beauty and love (symbolized by Thea's long hair). Moreover, Hedda is the more independent or romantic of the two women. Hedda has married Tesman apparently for no better reason than that “he insisted with might and main on being allowed to support me” (Act II, 300). Thea, on the other hand, has just walked out of her own marriage of convenience on account of what now seems to her a higher vocation, for she has become dedicated to the role of companion and support to Ejlert Lövborg; whereas Hedda tells her, “I want, for once in my life, to have power over a human being's fate.” (Act II, 324)

Judge Brack is a friend of the family with whom Hedda shares a habit of risqué conversation; he is cold-bloodedly cynical, and his one purpose throughout the play is to engineer an affair with Hedda. In her relationship with Judge Brack, Hedda tastes a little of her past sexual power. Brack, unlike the Tesman or Thea Elvsted, places a high value on power and makes it his business to obtain as much of it as humanly possible. In Brack, Hedda finds her match

and enjoys the small power she holds over him. Their seemingly good-natured teasing is fraught with double-entendre and bargaining over the terms of their future relationship that the purpose a “triangular arrangement” is not abhorrent to Hedda as long as she holds the power. However, as she tells the Judge much later in the play, she is “heartily thankful you’ve no hold or power over [her]” (Act III, 338) Though initially one might wonder why Hedda did not set her sights on the Judge – a man at once well-established and powerful – it can be reasoned that Brack lacks Tesman’s malleability. That he is powerful and that she might have had access to that power is incontestable, but she would have held little power over the Judge, just as, though she had access to her father’s power, she had little power over him. Ironically, though Jorgen Tesman was easy prey for Hedda – she easily gained power over him – she has no access to power through him. Further, Brack reveals little interest in sharing, connubially or otherwise, any portion of his power – his interests lie solely in “triangular arrangement.”

Ejlert Lövborg, however, is, again, a different matter. Hedda is drawn to Lövborg not merely for the ideological, economic, and physical power that is his birthright, but for the power of freedom he possesses as a function of his gender. While not all of his gender chooses to step outside the boundaries of acceptable society, any may step outside these boundaries and still remain socially acceptable. For Hedda, this is the ultimate power and yet it is the most elusive to her. While a woman might have access to male power through her father or husband, this power of freedom, by its very nature, can never be extended to her.\* Thus, Hedda is fascinated by it and has made it her business to experience this power vicariously, through Lövborg. Ibsen targets the sensational nature of Hedda’s desire in the following passage:

*...She wants to lead a man’s life. But then comes hesitations – the inherited deep – rooted beliefs... One marries Tesman but one occupies one’s imagination with Lövborg. One leans back in one’s chair, closes one eye, and pictures his adventures. ... She cannot do it herself – cannot take part in the other one’s goal – so she shoots herself.*

(Jacobs: 2002, 427)

Thus, Hedda is thrilled when, in her boredom and dissatisfaction, she discovers that Lövborg will soon re-enter her life. Through Lövborg, Hedda, prior to her marriage, had managed to realize vicariously all her male fantasies of living a debauched life free from the constraints of bourgeois convention. To Hedda, Lövborg has come to represent her male self; to Lövborg, Hedda has

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\* As Victoria Woodhull notes in her essay “Virtue: What It Is, and What It Is Not,” “We cannot render the terms ‘libertine’ and ‘rake’ as opprobrious as men have made ‘mistress’ and ‘courtesan’... The world enslaves our sex by the mere fear of an epithet; and as long as it can throw any vile term at us, before which we cower, it can maintain our enslavement.” (Schneir:1972, 147)

come to represent the missed chance – the seduction that never was. Thus, when they face each other for the first time after Hedda's wild threats against Lövborg, each is disappointed in the other. Hedda sees a man feminized through reformed living and the maternal influence of a good woman; Lövborg sees a woman who has thrown herself away in a mediocre marriage. When they discuss their past relationship, we understand that even then the relationship was operating on two different planes: while Lövborg believed he was seducing Hedda, she was actually gaining a secret knowledge from him – a knowledge that normally only a man would be party to:

*Lövborg: Yes, Hedda; and when I used to confess to you! Told you things about myself that no one else knew in those days. Sat there and owned up to going about whole days and nights blind drunk. Days and nights on end. Oh, Hedda, what sort of power in you was it – that forced me to confess things like that?*

*Hedda: Do you think it was some power in me?*

*Lövborg: Yes, how else can I account for it? And all these – these questions you used to put to me...indirectly.*

*Hedda: And that you understood perfectly well.*

*Lövborg: To think you could sit and ask questions like that! Quite frankly.*

*Hedda: Indirectly, mind you.*

*Lövborg: Yes, but frankly, all the same. Cross-question me about...about all that kind of thing.*

*Hedda: And to think that you could answer, Mr. Lövborg.*

*Lövborg: Yes, that's just what I can't understand, looking back. But tell me now, Hedda, wasn't it love that was at the bottom of that relationship? Wasn't it, on your side, as though you wanted to purify and absolve me, when I made you any confess? Wasn't it that?*

*Hedda: No, not quite.*

*Lövborg: What made you do it, then?*

*Hedda: Do you find it so impossible to understand, that a young girl, when there's an opportunity ... in secret...*

*Lövborg: Well?*

*Hedda: That one should want to have a glimpse of a world that...*

*Lövborg: that...?*

**Hedda:** *That one isn't allowed to know about?*

**Lövborg:** *So that was it, then?*

**Hedda:** *That...that as well, I rather think.*

**Lövborg:** *The bond of our common hunger for life.  
But why couldn't that have gone on, in my case?*

**Hedda:** *That was your own fault. (Act II, 316-317)*

We understand from their conversation that while Lövborg believed Hedda was in love with him and wanted, in fact, to reform him, Hedda wanted nothing of the sort. Hedda's gratification in the relationship lay in the vicarious power she experienced through his tales of debauchery. She has used the power of her sexual attractiveness to access Lövborg's power. When Lövborg had tried to consummate what he understood to be in large part of seduction, the horrified Hedda threatened him with her father's pistols. The horror that Hedda experienced was derived not from the impropriety of Lövborg's actions, but rather from the fact that her good companion would suddenly reduce her to female status – in effect, reduce her to the level of the women whose seductions he had so readily conveyed to Hedda. While she threatened to shoot him with her father's pistols, she couldn't follow through – her fear of scandal would not allow it. And yet, she tells Lövborg of the events long past, "That wasn't my worst piece of cowardice ... that night." (Act II, 318) Hedda's cowardice lies in her longing for and denial of freedom – her masculine gender identity longs for the power that comes with Lövborg's freedom and yet it will not allow her, as a female, to experience it.

Further, Hedda has held power over Lövborg – this much is abundantly clear from their conversation. Thus, when Thea tells Hedda that she has succeeded in garnering "some kind of power" (Act I, 287) over Lövborg, Hedda is exasperated. Her disappointment at Lövborg's having allowed himself to fall under the power of so innocuous a creature as Thea – a woman who cannot truly appreciate the possession of power – is profound. With Lövborg's acknowledgment that Thea has indeed gained power over him through her devotion to him, the play's action is reduced to a power struggle over the fate of Ejlert Lövborg.

Thus, the meeting between the three is marked by Hedda's manipulation and power strategies. Again we see Hedda at her most resourceful. When Thea, with a hint of proprietorship, reiterates Lövborg's refusal to imbibe, Hedda insists that he must partake. When he refuses her, the battle is on. Hedda will not be refused and, after noting that "... I have no power over you at all?" (Act II, 320) She employs a new strategy: she suggests that a glance of derision has been issued by Judge Brack at Lövborg's abstinence. Though Lövborg weakens slightly, he again refuses. The ever resourceful Hedda then employs knowledge of his and Thea's relationship imparted to her by Thea earlier in the play. The suggestion is that Thea has been disloyal and Lövborg crumbles under the knowledge that the woman upon whom he is morally dependent perceives him as

little more than a child. Hedda is triumphant as Lövborg toasts both Thea and Hedda, drinks two glasses of punch, and departs for an evening of more drinking.

Berte, the Tesmans' servant is another selfless female who finds meaning and satisfaction in her service to others. In Act I, it is disclosed that she has been a loyal retainer in the Tesman family for years, and that with Jorgen marriage to Hedda, she has come to the newlyweds' villa as servant and caretaker. Nothing is disclosed of her private life, but she speaks of "all the blessed years" that she spent with the Tesmans, suggesting that she has found fulfillment only in their employ and that she has had neither husband nor children. Jorgen and Miss Tesman both treat her with affection and respect. In addition, as if she were a member of the family, they confide in her, something that Hedda cannot do. Her overly-protective behavior towards Jorgen annoys Hedda, who wants to rid the house of Berte and threatens to do so with a petty complaint about her carelessness.

What happens to Hedda is that she wanted to keep away from herself: reality spoils her expectations. The man she chooses to prove to the world and to herself through his act that free choice does exist in the world and that we are not slaves to our bodies and desires, fails to perform this deed. 'The beautiful death' might well come from the general's vocabulary. A beautiful death that turned its back on the vanities of mortal life was the highest value in masculine power from Ancient Greece up to the late romantic period, and even beyond. If Lövborg had been able to do it beautifully (Act IV, 355), as a man - even in the eyes of Hedda's father—it might have given strength to Hedda to become a woman. When Lövborg fails in this, she has to act herself. She has to die in the place of someone. Hedda has fallen in love with the idea of masculine power and action. As Caroline Mayerson suggests, her subsequent attempts at shaping Lövborg's destiny into something romantic prove the symptom of this:

*It is this tradition, however ignoble its carrier, to which the pistols and Hedda (in her own mind) belong, and it is, after all, the General only as glimpsed through his daughter's ambitions and conceptions of worth that is of real importance in the play. These conceptions, as embodied in Hedda's romantic ideal of manhood, may be synthesized from the action and the dialogue. The aristocrat possesses courage and self-control. He expresses himself through direct and independent action... but the recklessness is tempered by a disciplined will, by means of which he "beautifully" orders both his own actions and those of others on whom his power is imposed. He shoots straight – to defend his life or his honour, and to maintain his authority.*

(Mayerson: 1965, 135-136)

This desire is expressed in her handling of her father's pistols. The pistols have an immediate association with individual power and action, the ability to dictate and control situations. Hedda's random firing of them at the beginning of Act II illustrates that by this stage, she is not too concerned what shape this power takes (i.e. whether it involves directly her own fate or someone else's); it is the principle of having a participating role that is the issue. The pistols are phallic symbols, signifiers of power in a patriarchal environment, which she is denied in her role as an upper-class, female housewife in the public eye. Thanks largely to her father's upbringing and the lack of a mother figure, Hedda is more attracted by the masculine concepts existing in society, rather than by the traditional female roles of 'wife' and 'mother'. For example, Brack occupies a location of power Hedda simply cannot bear; constantly entering as he has done from the back door, his presence represents potential social scandal. She tells Brack, "So I am in your power, Mr. Brack. From now on, you have a hold over me." (Act IV, 362) Hedda has not been raised to be psychologically content with such an existence; therefore, she immediately adds, "In you power, all the same. At the mercy of your will and demands. And so a slave! A slave! No! That thought I cannot tolerate. Never!" (Act IV, 362) Ibsen presents a catalogue of social and psychological factors that all contribute towards Hedda's death.

In seeking power over the people around her, she forgets her motherhood. For her, a future in the Tesman household is psychologically unattainable: Thea and Tesman have moved out of her sphere of influence, and the focus on Lövborg's work seems to re-emphasize she will not have any significant role to play in future affairs. Married to a man to whom she does not relate, pregnant with a child she does not want. Hedda's life becomes the antithesis to her father's role, and complete anathema to "General Gabler's daughter" (Act I, 265). Hedda struggles violently against the conventional wife-mother role, a role she does not want but is mortally afraid to reject. She suffers most from being victimized by motherhood. She is unable to face or to escape the suffocating reality of marriage and motherhood. She tries her best to resume courage but through cowardice. That surely is as big a factor in her self-destruction as is her fear of being held sexual hostage to the sinister Judge Brack, who threatens to expose her to scandal, of which she is at least equally terrified.

Concerning motherhood, the other female characters in *Hedda Gabler*, even those unseen, have one thing in common with Hedda. They are women who have either failed to meet the male ideal of woman as wife-mother or have rejected it, as Hedda. They also differ from Hedda in a vitally significant way: they have made peace with themselves. And therein they represent some of the limited alternatives to what society at large viewed as a woman's primary goal — marriage and motherhood. George Tesman's two aunts are maiden aunts; Thea Elvsted has fled a brutal and loveless marriage, and Berta, having given her life over to service, remains, presumably, unattached outside the Tesman family. Two of the unseen female characters, Aunt Rina and Mademoiselle Diana, are excellent examples of offstage characters whose presence is felt but never seen.

The one is George Tesman's dying aunt; the other, "a mighty huntress of men," is a lady of pleasure for those who can afford her.

Ibsen employs a reversal of traditional gender roles within Hedda and Jorgen Tesman's marriage to emphasize Hedda's masculine and power traits to ascertain her social identity and entity. Hedda displays no emotion or affection towards her husband Jorgen. This appearance of indifference is a quality that is usually common to men:

*Tesman: My old morning shoes. My slippers-look!...I missed them dreadfully. Now you should see them, Hedda.*

*Hedda: No thanks, it really doesn't interest me.*

(Act I, 273)

In another gender role reversal, Hedda displays a financial awareness, which her husband, Jorgen does not possess. Throughout a long conversation in Act I, Brack corresponds with Jorgen about his honeymoon travels, he corresponds with Hedda concerning the financial matters. This is a role that is usually reserved for men. Hedda does not only display traits, which are definitively masculine, or feminine, she also objects to and often resists the conventions established for her gender by society. Hedda's unsuitability for her domestic role is also shown by her impatience and equivocation at any reference to her pregnancy as a reminder of her gender and weakness; therefore she rejects the idea of motherhood, and of domestic tranquility.

*Tesman: Have you noticed how plump [Hedda's] grown, and how well she is? How much she's filled out on our travels?*

*Hedda: Oh, be quiet!*

(Act I, 275)

Hedda is reminded not only of her feminine role of mother and nurturer here, but also as wife and appendage to Tesman. In fact, Hedda has the personality of a leader and is utterly unsuited to the role of suburban housewife.

Hedda had made the mistake of believing that her husband, in his maleness, values power as much as she does, when in fact, he values it not at all. This much she has learned on her tedious honeymoon. Furthermore, upon arriving home, they learn that the position promised is in jeopardy, their finances are precarious, and there is little hope of enjoying a large social life or even purchasing a new riding horse. She is further disappointed in her vague hopes of a future political career for Tesman:

*Hedda: ...I very often wonder... whether I could get my husband to go into politics.*

*Brack (laughing): Tesman! Oh, come now! Things like politics aren't a bit – they're not at all his line of country.*

**Hedda:** *Then you think, do you, it would be absolutely impossible for him to get into the Government?*

**Brack:** *...to do that he'd need to be a fairly rich man in the first place.*

**Hedda** *(getting up impatiently): Yes. There we have it. It's this middle-class world that I have got into. (crossing the stage) It's that that makes life so wretched! So absolutely ludicrous! Because that's what it is.*  
(Act II, 306)

She has access to none of the male power – political, financial, social, or otherwise – she had envisioned. The only power she has is over an effeminate man she can barely tolerate – a man who has little interest in the male power she so covets.

Comparing Nora in *A Doll's House* and Hedda Gabler, one may find that they are generally two different female characters created by the same playwright. Hedda lives through others by manipulation. Hedda is a coward; she is afraid of taking charge of her life and making something of herself. Since she feels a lack of control over her life, she tries and pretends to control others. She is unhappy because she has actually no control and strives to make everyone else unhappy. Ibsen wrote many plays that challenged Victorian notions of women, sometimes creating characters in the form of the “New Woman,” a term used in the press of the day to describe the woman who dared to challenge traditional behavior of women by becoming authoritative, unhappy with their conventional life, and conflicted between a desire of being “womanly” and yet live outside the boundaries of that definition of the time. Like many “New Woman” characters, Hedda commits suicide at the end because there is no place for her in society: if she conforms she is unhappy, and if she rebels she gives up love and respect of others. She was a misfit for her time. Unlike Nora in *A Doll's House*, who starts out as the quiet, dutiful wife, and is eventually driven to rebellion by the bourgeois conventionality of her husband, Hedda cannot leave quietly because there is nothing quiet or gentle about this character from beginning to end. Nora decided to face life and to find her entity and identity as a female; whereas Hedda chooses the radical freedom of death rather than a mediocre existence under the control of others. Like *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler* ends with a bang. Suddenly abandoning her husband and children, Nora slams the front door as she strikes out on her own. But the loud noise in *Hedda Gabler* is a gunshot.

To conclude, the mothers and wives who are presented in most of Ibsen's plays are in fact powerless females in the grip of powerful males. Hedda Gabler is a different woman, a woman who has felt, from as far back as she can remember, that being female is worthless. She has been raised in a home with an authoritative, domineering father and an absent mother; a home where the ruling principle was power, rather than love. She is the final negative product of the domination / submission model of marriage – the woman whose very gender



makes her hate herself. She does not kill herself only, but she also kills her mind: the source of her dissatisfaction, the source of her understanding of her powerlessness. Hedda has learned to value only power, but has come to finally and absolutely understand that she will never possess it.

*Social Diseases and Victims in the Ghosts: Syphilis and Deception*

In late nineteenth century Europe, syphilis was seen as a scourge upon society. It evoked the same hysteria, stereotyping and paranoia that the AIDS epidemic did a century later. The infected were social outcasts and considered responsible for their own infection. The main social criticism in the *Ghosts* (1881) focuses on syphilis and deception in society through a symbolic – realistic level. People may socially inherit deception as they physically inherit syphilis with same destructive effects.

Henrik Ibsen was not the first dramatist who used syphilis as a theme for his dramatic purposes, referring to its serious effects such as damage to the nervous system, heart, or brain. There are references to this disease in William Shakespeare's play *Measure for Measure*, particularly in a number of early passages spoken by the character Lucio, whose name, suggesting light and truth, is meant to indicate that he is to be taken seriously. For example Lucio says "...thy bones are hollow" (Act I, Sc. II.); this is a reference to the fragility of bones caused by the use of mercury which was then widely used to treat syphilis. Within the same scene, Claudio tells Lucio:

*Like rats that raven down their proper bane,  
A thirsty evil, and when we drink, we die,*

(Act I, Sc. II.)

These lines refer with the characteristic pregnant brevity of the dramatist in his later years to the fact that syphilis is the inevitable accompaniment of the expression of the desire that is our essential nature.

Disease is a prominent motif in late nineteenth century European literature. A number of critics have prominently interpreted characters as diverse as the protagonist of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), the troglodytic alter-ego in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and even the vampiric victims of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) as painted in terms of syphilitic deformity and regression. Most explicitly, Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) has one of its female protagonists actively seek to kill her syphilitic son; whereas G. Wilson Knight observes that the heritage of guilt in *Ghosts* "is like the curse on the house of Atreus in the Oresteia." (Knight: 1965, 51) Pre-dating all of these is Ibsen's *Ghosts*.

*Ghosts* was a logical sequel to *A Doll's House*, and when *Ghosts* was published two years later in 1881, Ibsen was denounced as architect of the greatest scandal of modern times. In *Ghosts*, the society portrayed enforces stereotypes to such a degree that all individuality is suppressed and characters are forced to conform to stereotypes or be shunned and deemed unacceptable. In

such a society where deceit is encouraged rather than truth and where one's "duty" is to be adhered to despite all underlying circumstances, only such deceit and dishonesty can prevail while those who try to do the right thing struggle to conform to impossible standards.

Oswald returns home after decades of living in Paris. He is a painter, and in his return, he reveals he is sick and needs caring. Mrs. Alving, his mother, is willing to do so, and she tells him stories about his father, Captain Alving, a hero of his town. In fact, Mrs. Alving, with the help of Mr. Pastor Manders, has established an orphan asylum (an orphanage) to memorialize his death, and it is scheduled to be dedicated the following day. She does not want anyone to doubt that he was a good and honorable man. At the same time, she is a free-thinking woman and feels compelled to tell her son the truth about his father. Mr. Manders soon discovers that Captain Alving was anything but a saint. Mrs. Alving reveals that her husband's reputation was all her doing, hiding the Captain's drunken state, his laziness and being a ladies' man. He even had another child (with another woman), Regina, who is now caretaker of the Alving house.

Oswald and Regina fall in love. Regina does not know he is ill, but Oswald thinks that Regina is the only woman who can heal him from his strange wounds made in Paris (almost certainly, a syphilitic inheritance from his father the Captain). Mrs. Alving and Manders are forced to tell them both the truth: Regina is angry at the revelation, feeling she should have been educated and raised as Alving's daughter and not a servant. Regina learns of Oswald's illness and is relieved she did not marry him as first intended. She flees along with her supposed father Engstrand, also an employee of the Alvings.

The play ends shortly after Oswald has elicited a promise from his mother to administer a deadly dose of morphine to him when the disease overtakes his mind. She refuses at first, horrified, but then she realizes that helping her son to pass away would be an act of mercy. The closing scene depicts Mrs. Alving in the throes of her anguished decision, while her son, suddenly reduced to a catatonic state, mutters repeatedly, "The sun, the sun." (Act III, 102) We do not know whether Mrs. Alving will relieve her son's misery or whether she will let him continue to live in this literally mindless state.

Unfortunately, *Ghosts* as an English word does not accurately explain the Norwegian title of the play, which means 'Those-Who-Walk-Again'. Unquestionably, the latter is profoundly relevant to the meaning of the play. Nonetheless, the title refers to all ideas, characters, beliefs and outdated piety we have inherited from the past and believed in them without scrutiny. This heritage must be re-examined in the light of each individual's experience; if not they will affect our lives, children and contour our future as well. Mrs. Alving's speech on "ghosts," in the second act, establishes the play's key metaphor. She says,

*I'm haunted by ghosts. When I heard Regina and Oswald  
out there, it was just as if there were ghosts before my very*

*eyes.... it's not only the things that we've inherited from our fathers and mothers that live on in us, but all sorts of old dead ideas and old dead beliefs, and things of the sort. They're not actually alive in us, but they're rooted there all the same, and we can't rid ourselves of them. I've only to pick up a newspaper, and when I read it I seem to see ghosts gliding between the lines. I should think there must be ghosts all over the country – as countless as grains of sand. And we are, all of us, so pitifully afraid of the light.*

(Act II, 61)

The “ghosts” of duty and public opinion come to dominate and ruin generations of lives. Mrs. Alving feels that all people are haunted not only by their inheritances from specific people, but by general superstitions that exist within a community. The idea of filial piety, or duty to family members above all else, is such a ghost. Having himself suffered all his life under the conservatism of Norwegian provincialism, Ibsen personally found how such a society destroys the “joy of life” in its creative intellects leaving bitterness and frustration. Mrs. Alving makes the central themes of *Ghosts* explicit in this speech where she confronts Manders with the concept.

Concerning symbolic realism, syphilis and deception are working together in the text. They technically support each other to generate the final understanding of the social criticism that Ibsen aims at. The analogy between syphilis as an inherited disease and deception as a social disease is obvious in the sense that deception is like peeling away layers of onion skin. One is left with only a sad remnant of transparent chops by the end. The illness would seem to prove Mrs. Alving's theory that her son is actually haunted by his father. The most thematic structure of the play is built on the concept of deception, which is presented in Mrs. Alving marriage, the orphanage, Pastor Manders – Mrs. Alving relationship, Oswald – Regina relationship, and Regina – Alving's relationship.

Mrs. Alving's sin is that she is very careful to preserve her husband's public reputation through deception and to conserve her filial piety since she has been raised as a dutiful girl to become a dutiful wife and mother. To Ibsen, both cases are regarded as superstitions or ghosts that exist within a society. She refers to her duty and role as a mother to Oswald a few times in the text but mostly she talks about the guilt of sending him away and how she missed him because she was trying to keep the truth from him. She did not want him tainted with his father's sins. She tells Pastor Manders, “Yes, thanks to my regard for duty, I've been lying to my boy for years on end. What a coward – what a coward I've been!” (Act II, 59) Nevertheless, Mrs. Alving represents the central character that stands amidst deception in the play. The fact that she knows her husband's immoral life and she reluctantly matches him in his drinking sessions shows that she is a woman of deception. Mrs. Alving is affected by the class system in a different way from Engstrand. Deceit for her is sprung not from the ambition of social climbing, but for the purpose of preserving the good - though

undeserved - reputation of the Alving family. Reputation for the upper and middle classes was a serious business. Unlike today, when a divorce would be socially accepted, people involved in such scandals were often shunned by their peers. Pastor Manders himself agrees with the cover-up of Captain Alving's affair. For a religious man to condone such a colossal and complicated lie to the rest of the world shows how large the issue of reputation was.

Mrs. Alving often resents the Pastor, especially when he constantly accuses her of gross sins of familial betrayal and personal failure. At the same time, she condescends to him, humouring his gullibility. When Engstrand convinces the Pastor that his marriage was arranged and carried out in the most moral way possible, Mrs. Alving sees through the lies but does not bother to enlighten the Pastor. Instead, she is amused by his naïve acceptance of the story. Twenty – eight years ago, when she fled her husband, she went to the Pastor, offering herself up to him. The Pastor dutifully sent her home to her husband: “I had the necessary strength of mind to dissuade you from your outrageous plan; and that it was vouchsafed to me to lead you back to the path of duty – and home to your rightful husband.” (Act I, 47) She was crushed, and has since fulfilled her “duty” to the utmost. Obviously, his rejection had a huge impact on her. The two now agree that they do not understand each other.

During the course of the play, Mrs. Alving discloses to Pastor Manders the true nature of her marriage after she returned home. For the sake of appearance, she convinced her husband to move to the country, where his dishonest ways might be concealed, and she sent her son Oswald to boarding school so that he would never learn the truth about his father's dissolute life. “I didn't want Oswald, my own son, to inherit anything whatever from his father” (Act I, 52). Helene Alving sacrificed herself by partaking of the drinking sessions with Alving, in the privacy of their home, and struggling with his violence as she nightly put him to bed.

*To keep him at home in the evenings – and at night –  
I've had to force myself to join in his secret drinking  
bouts up in his room. I've had to sit alone with him –  
clinking glasses and drinking with him, and listening  
to his lewd stupid talk. I've had to fight with him,  
physically, to get him to go to bed.*

(Act I, 51)

All the while, she took over the family business, made charitable donations in her husband's name, and wrote to her son of his father's philanthropic deeds. Mrs. Alving has even been able to hide the captain's indiscretion of impregnating the housemaid, who is sent away with a bundle of money and whose daughter, Regina, the product of his indiscretion now serves as the maid for Mrs. Alving.

The fact that she leaves her husband to go seek the man that she really loves shows a great tendency of unfaithfulness and deceit. Ibsen wants to show

that this situation is worse than Nora's in that in the end Mrs. Alving was unable to save her son from his father's sins and everything from the past just comes back to haunt her. Had she made a different choice before she got married, her life might have turned out alright, but she let her mother take her into marriage when she did not know, much less love, the Captain. She also comes to some amazing conclusions about life as a woman and what is considered right and wrong according to the Pastor. Once again, Ibsen uses this theme of deception to make the audience think about social norms and their consequences to real life people. He tries to shed light on such women's issues to bring about change.

Another phase of deception is Oswald who is living under the influence of his dead father, a reminder of Captain Alving to the world. The boy's own memories of his father were confined to one incident in his childhood when his father had taken him on his knee and encouraged him to smoke a large meerschaum pipe. Oswald remembered this episode, and upon his return home, he took a certain pride in lighting up his father's old pipe and parading in front of his mother and Pastor Manders. Pastor Manders describes his first meeting with Oswald as "like seeing his father in the flesh." (Act I, 40) He goes further to say that Oswald has "inherited a worthy name from an industrious man", (Act I, 41) and that it should be an "inspiration" to him. Not only does this "ghost" influence the way Oswald behaves, as he tries to be worthy of the "beautiful illusion" (Act II, 60) he holds of his father, but it also influences the way people see him. Actually, Captain Alving was an alcoholic and led a dissolute life; this wrack of syphilis is his own product that Mrs. Alving tries to hide.

Ibsen often moves from the realistic presentation to the symbolic and vice versa. Mrs. Alving tried to keep her husband's "irregularities" secret, to protect Oswald, who she feared would be poisoned by the unwholesome atmosphere in the Alving home. The Orphanage is built, not only to "refute all the rumours and dispel any doubts" (Act I, 52), but also make sure that Oswald would not "inherit anything whatever from his father." (Act I, 52) This last aim is fruitless. Although Oswald does not inherit money from his father, he inherits aspects of his personality. Oswald inherits his father's "joy of living". He shows signs of drunkenness, as he drinks liquor to "keep the damp out." (Act II, 70)

However, Oswald inherits something far worse, something from which his mother, for all her "sacrifice", could not protect him. Through Captain Alving's "dissolute life", Oswald has inherited congenital syphilis. He has "been riddled from birth". The audience, along with Oswald, is reminded, "the sins of the fathers are revisited on the children." (Act II, 74) The "ghosts" of the past cannot be escaped. Like his father, Oswald will die of syphilis. This fear consumes him, and is only abated when his mother promises to give him "a helping hand" to end the torment if he experiences another attack.

Regina's birth is another manifestation of social deception in the play. She is an illegitimate daughter of Johanna and Captain Alving but she is believed to be the daughter of Jacob Engstrand, the carpenter who is working at the Orphanage. She is now Mrs. Alving's maidservant. Her action shows that she

uses many masks to achieve her aims. She has a hostile relationship with Jacob Engstrand and does not have much respect for him.

Regina is quite attractive and flirts with Pastor Manders. Oswald becomes attracted to Regina and in her he sees a joy that he does not have. He tells his mother that she is his own salvation. (Act II, 80) Regina wants to marry Oswald and travel to Paris and some of her dialogues include French words to show her intention of being with Oswald. Eventually, Regina finds out that Oswald is in fact her half-brother and that Engstrand is not her father but instead, it was Mr. Alving. Upon finding out about Oswald's illness, she loses interest in marrying him and decides to go away with Pastor Manders.

Regina is fundamentally a 'social climber'. She preserves a façade in front of the 'higher class' people in society but in front of her father she is condescending and patronising because she does not agree with his ideals. The short crucial opening sentences of the play show that she is commanding her father, who is actually in the same class as her, older than her, and is a man, which implies that she believes herself superior to him. She has ideas above her position and views herself as part of the upper class. She commands her father by saying, "What do you want? Stay where you are, you're dripping wet." (Act I, 21) Furthermore, she is speaking French with her father because it is a more sophisticated language which makes her seem as if she fitted in with the upper classes. It also shows how much more intelligent she thinks she is than her father, "Alright, alright, but get along now. I'm not going to stand here and have a rendezvous with you." (Act I, 22) She believes she is of a higher class than her father because she has been brought up by Mrs. Alving when she says, "What *me*? When I've been brought up by a lady like Mrs. Alving?" (Act I, 23) Then the sudden change from the harsh tone used with her father to the pleasant tone with Manders shows her attempts to maintain a certain appearance around higher class people, so she will fit in. "Why, good morning, Pastor. Is the streamer in already?" (Act I, 27)

Her open flirting with the Pastor by drawing attention to her body reveals her personality further and the audience may be disgusted by her speech as it is specifically directed to a holy figure.

Paster Manders: *Excellent, thank you. [Looking at her] Do you know, Miss Engstrad, I really do believe you've grown since I saw you last!*

Regina: *Do you think so, Pastor? Madam says I've filled out, too.* (Act I, 28-29)

It is obvious that Regina is tempting the Pastor because she wants to raise her status in society since the Pastor is a respected and influential member of the community. We can see that she is greedy and deceptive because later on we see that she is attracted to Oswald as well.

Again, Regina reveals her deceptive nature when she agrees to take advantage of her 'youth' when the rest of her schemes and plans have failed, the

matter she has refused at the start of the play. She tells Mrs. Alving, “A poor girl’s got to make the best of her youth, or before she knows it she’ll be left out in the cold. I’ve got the joy of living in me, too, Madam.” (Act III, 94) The last statement said by Regina reveals her true colours here. “Pooh! Adieu.” (Act III, 95) It shows just how much affection she really has for Mrs. Alving and Oswald. The fake mask of caring that she had put on comes off and the audience realizes just how untamed she really is. Ibsen shows this different side of Regina to illustrate that individuals try to mask their true intentions in order to get what they want.

Pastor Manders is a local priest from the nearby town. He often lectures others about morality and religion. Sometimes, his financial dealings regarding the orphanage seem suspect, and he is quick to bend to public opinion. He believes that Mrs. Alving should not have abandoned her husband and should not have sent her son into the world at such an early age. He is easily shocked. Pastor Manders is overwhelmingly associated to the main symbol of deception in the play. He has supervised the official business of constructing the orphanage and who will dedicate it the following day; the orphanage which Mrs. Alving financially supports in the tenth anniversary of her husband’s death, Captain Alving. Mrs. Alving plans to raise this one great memorial to him so that she will not have to ever again speak of him. She wants to avoid the terrible truth: that he was a cheating, immoral philanderer whose public reputation was a sham.

With the dedication of the orphanage, built with the exact sum that Captain Alving possessed when she married him, Mrs. Alving believes that she is finally able to rid herself of the burden under which she has lived all these years; the orphanage will be the final act of atonement; the ghosts of the marriage will be put to rest. Later, the orphanage will burn to the ground (a result of carelessness with a candle).

A deception within deception occurs with Pastor Manders when Engstrand and the Pastor return to the house, announcing that the orphanage is lost to the flames. Engstrand convinces the Pastor that there will be a public scandal, blaming the Pastor for carelessly letting the prayer candles start the fire. He blackmails the Pastor into funding his sailor establishment, convincing the Pastor that it will be dedicated to the reform of sailors.

Jakob Engstrand is an alcoholic carpenter with a deformed leg; he married Johanna when she was pregnant with Captain Alving’s child. The daughter was Regina. At the start of the play, he is working on the orphan asylum meant to memorialize Captain Alving. He wants to use the money he is saving to open an “establishment” for sailors. When speaking to Pastor Manders, whom the hypocritical Jakob always tries to please, he describes the establishment as a place to reform sailors. But when he describes it to Regina, it sounds like a high-class saloon.

In conclusion, the ghosts of the past rise to choke Mrs. Alving, the hypocritical Pastor Manders, and even the innocent victims of their parents’ sins. Ibsen is said to have written Mrs. Alving with the idea of what would have

happened if Nora had returned home instead of leaving her husband and children. The fact that Mrs. Alving takes charge of the family, the finances, the business, and even goes so far as to send her son away shows that she is rebelling against what society expects of her. She has her own ideas of right and wrong but she still worries about society at large and her reputation as well as that of her family. The fact that she left her husband to go seek the man that she really loved shows great strength and character as well as her rebellion. Because she was turned away, she went home and tried to make the best of a bad situation. After all, she had no alternatives or any other place to go. Ibsen wants to show that this situation is worse than Nora's in that in the end Mrs. Alving was unable to save her son from his father's sins and everything from her past just came back to haunt her. Had she made a different choice before she got married, her life might have turned out alright, but she let her mother take her into marriage when she didn't know, much less love, the Captain. She also comes to some pretty amazing conclusions about life as a woman and what is considered right and wrong according to the Pastor. She reads material with different point of view and takes the position that she will come to her own conclusions about what she thinks concerning issues of importance. Once again, Ibsen uses his story and dialogue to make the audience think about social norms and their consequences to real life people and is trying to bring women's issues to the forefront in order to bring about change. He dealt with the consequences of such relationships in his life and saw how wrong this arrangement was as well as the pain and suffering that was brought on by these societal norms.

### *Henrik Ibsen's Socio-political Ideals: Personal Codes versus Social / Political Codes in A Public Enemy*

There is at least one common trait in the dramatic works of Ibsen, Shaw and Brecht as far as the political issues and themes are concerned. This common trait lurks in the fact that the political affairs and circumstances in their plays are products of the social environment and vice versa. In other words, they reflect and generate each other dynamically. The role of the individual is to face these issues, to challenge them and to overcome them. This dialectical role in facing and challenging such conditions may make the individual a victim of external and uncontrollable powers that lead him either to destruction or to find a synthesis as a solution for these volatile socio-political problems. Mostly such syntheses are either formulated in the spectators' minds or realized by the protagonists themselves within the text.

As a playwright, Ibsen expressed his thoughts and personal views on politics, ideals, war, cowardice, art and culture, love and dislikes. One can simply distill a conclusion that he turned to individualism which is a task of the courageous artist to change the minds of people and the prevailed societal norms in a radical way, and not the politicians with their compromises. Ibsen had a



very uneasy relationship to politicians and party politics. Always keenly interested in politics, Ibsen was not at any time in regular standing with a political party. Many Marxist writers, like Georgi Pekhanov, describe Henrik Ibsen as a petty bourgeois whose way of thinking is apolitical, and he is entirely indifferent to politics. Nonetheless, *A Public Enemy* may be regarded as the typical play where Ibsen's socio-political and other relevant issues are most in the foreground.

*A Public Enemy* is a masterpiece conceived in the heat of battle of democratic transition in Europe. It was published in 1882. There were parliamentary elections in Norway that year. It was one of the most important election years in Norwegian history – if not the most important. The liberals' plan was to pack the impeachment tribunal. The upcoming impeachment trial was a major cause of the first Norwegian parliamentary government at the end of June in 1884. Therefore, 1882 was an important year in the democratic transition.

The plot of *A Public Enemy* might be based on two real incidents, which had been reported to Henrik Ibsen. The first happened when a German doctor announced that the spa of his town was contaminated by cholera. Consequently, the tourists were afraid of visiting the town. The townsfolk stoned the doctor's house and he had to leave the town. A similar incident occurred in Norway of a chemist who had accused the Christiania Steam Kitchens of neglecting the poor. When he tried to read his written allegation in a public meeting, the chairman prevented him from speaking and the audience forced him to withdraw, very much as Dr. Stockmann does in the play.

Generally speaking, there are two apparently conflicting values in Ibsen's *A Public Enemy*. Personal ideals are expedient for the benefit of an individual; whereas social/political ideals support the agency of the whole community. To create tension and conflict within the drama out of these two oppositional forces, Ibsen constructs a border between personal codes and social/political codes. Accordingly, terms like democracy and individual freedom may be equivoques within such a context. Dr. Stockman's dilemma emerges from his being an idealist, else he would know that in a democratic environment, the individual has the right to express his own opinion and he has the freedom to choose the lawful way to do so. Nevertheless, when democracy defies the authority through the individuals, it is then understood as a source of jeopardy and should be eradicated. What threatens the authority, which is elected by the majority, threatens the whole society; and any body that stands against this dogma is regarded as a public enemy.

The protagonist is Doctor Tomas Stockmann who begins an apolitical mission, which will lead him to an inevitable and tempestuous political challenge to authority. He has just discovered that a bathing complex that is essential to the town's economy is seriously polluted. The waters of the Baths are contaminated by a leak from a nearby tannery. He alerts several members of the community and receives generous support and thanks for making this discovery

in time to save the town. The next day his brother, Peter Stockmann the town Mayor and the antagonist, tells him he has to retract his statement to the town to repair the Baths it would cost too much money for the town; the Mayor is not convinced by the doctors findings. They have a huge argument, but the Doctor hopes that the newspaper will support him. However, the Mayor convinces the newspaper to oppose him. Soon after the doctor holds a town meeting to state his case, the Mayor and Aslaksen, the newspaper printer, try to keep him from speaking. The doctor begins a long lecture in which he attacks the foundations of the town and the tyranny of the majority. The people find his speech offensive and revolt against the doctor. The next morning the doctor's house is vandalized and all the people who supported him earlier now oppose him.

Finally, Dr. Stockmann is fired as doctor for the local bath. There is a campaign for people not to use him as a personal doctor. No one dares to have anything to do with the public enemy, not even the "independent" and wealthy employer of ship captain Horster who obtained permission to use the hall where the meeting was held. He is deprived of his captaincy on the ship on which he planned to take Dr. Stockmann and his family to America. Dr. Stockmann's landlord will not permit him to remain in his residence. His daughter, Petra, is fired as a schoolteacher. The doctor's two boys reveal that the other children at school had fought them and, because of that, the headmaster suggested they stay home for a few days. The doctor reminds his wife of his decision to emigrate, then notices the mob has torn his best trousers: "you should never wear your best trousers when you go to fight for truth and freedom." (Act V, 198) Dr. Stockmann remains steadfast. Later, he changes his mind, he tells his wife and daughter they are not going to leave town but will hold their ground and look for a house. "Yes, here. This is the battlefield – here's where the fight is, and here's where I shall triumph." (Act V, 215) He adds that he will continue treating the poor, who cannot pay, but will "preach to them in season and out of season" (Act V, 216)). Replying his wife, Dr. Stockmann sums up his and Ibsen's purpose in life:

*That's utter nonsense, Katrina. Do you want me to be rooted in the field by public opinion and the solid majority, and all the rest of that devil's work? No thank you, my dear. You see, what I want to do is quite simple and straightforward: I just want to knock it into these mongrels' heads that the liberals are the craftiest enemies a free man has – that party programmes simply wiring the necks of any promising young truth– that expediency turns justice and morality upside down, till life here just isn't worth living.* (Act V, 216)

Good government requires nobility of spirit, Ibsen thought, and good education was required to develop noble and free people. At the end of the play, Dr. Stockmann decides to begin a school for the street boys with the help of

Petra. The doctor declares that the children will not set foot in that school again, that he will teach them "... in the room where they called a public enemy." (Act V, 218). He asks his two sons if they know any "mongrel" children because evidently he would never get children of the Home Owner's Council to attend. "I am going to try an experiment on some mongrels ... there may be some excellent material among them" (Act V, 218). They are to be brought up as free and noble men, who will chase away the conformists of the older generation when they grow up. This statement implies that amongst the bourgeois he had found no interesting minds that perhaps he might find some amongst the proletariat. This is Dr. Stockmann's final decision: to stay in the town to defy authority. His family is supportive and he says, "that the strongest man in the world is the man who stands most alone." (Act V, 219)

The interplay between the social and the personal codes causes tension between Tomas and Peter Stockmann which provides much of the interest in the play. The Mayor tells his brother to act in a more socially based manner, but this is why Dr Stockmann is concerned about the pollution from the Baths. Dr Stockmann does not understand how the public will react to his findings. Despite his naivety and obsession with his personal ethics, the Doctor is acting as he does because of his concern for the public; he does not want them to be harmed by the pollutants in the baths. Concerning his personal ideals, truth is important to the Doctor because delivering an untruth will harm the public more than the loss of tourist money while the Baths are under repair. Dr Stockmann is therefore acting in a manner that supports his personal beliefs while benefiting the health of the public. His personal ethics have to face and challenge the social/political power out of which the dramatic dilemma and conflict emerge. When he is asked to withdraw his article since the paper will not print it, he replies:

Dr. Stockmann: *You dare not? What nonsense!  
You're the editor, I should have thought the editor  
controlled the paper!*

Aslaksen: *No, Doctor, it's the readers who do that.*

The Mayor: *Fortunately, yes.*

Aslaksen: *It's public opinion – the enlightened  
majority, the householders and the like...they're the  
ones who control the paper.*

Dr Stockmann: *And I have all these forces against  
me?* (Act III, 170-171)

In fact, it is not readers, but capital interests, which put pressure on the newspaper. Editor Hovstad of *The Courier* wants to stand up for the right opinions, but unfortunately the creditors of the paper do not agree, and they have power to stop it.

Psychologically speaking, the social/political code might be compared with Freud's concept of the "superego" or society, while individualism with his concept of the "id" or intrinsic human nature or truth. What is interesting,

however, is Ibsen's forcing the social/political code to come into direct conflict with the latter. In Act I, Peter Stockmann reproaches his brother for following ethics based on individual convictions.

**Peter Stockmann:** *You have an ingrained tendency to go your own way, whatever the circumstances- and in a well-ordered community that is almost as reprehensible. The individual must subordinate himself to Society as a whole – or rather, to those authorities whose duty it is to watch over the welfare of Society.*

(Act I, 113-114)

The Mayor makes it obvious that he will not endure ethical codes that demoralize the power of the hegemony, of which he is the leader. He implies that a “well ordered community” cannot exist unless “the individual” (he refers to his brother, Dr Stockmann) is prepared to be submissive to the “authority” of the governing body. Another connotation of the Mayor's dialogue is that individual rights, as opposed to those of the governing body, do not have the care of the community's welfare as first priority. (Act I, 114) It is here that Ibsen, through the character of Peter Stockmann, the Mayor constructs a border between the personal and social/political, to introduce conflict between the Mayor and his brother. The playwright induces us to believe the ethical codes of the two brothers are universally incompatible and therefore, Dr Stockmann's longing to publish the truth about the Baths, will run in opposition to the Mayor's wishes; thus creating a perceived borderland of conflict.

In Act II, Ibsen efficiently portrays a confrontation between personal and social/political issues. Mayor Stockmann arrives at his brother's home to discuss the report and again shows that he has no concern whatsoever for the truth, but only for propriety. He is concerned that his brother might bring the report to the attention of the spa's board of directors. The doctor's outlook changes when his brother informs him about the incredible cost that the proposed changes would require. Because of the cost, the Mayor either refuses to comprehend, or is simply in denial about, the seriousness of the problem.

**Dr. Stockmann:** *No right...!*

**The Mayor:** *Not as a member of the staff. As a private individual, naturally, it's different matter; but as a minor official of the Baths, you have no right to express any opinion which conflicts with that of your superiors.*

**Dr. Stockmann:** *This is too much! I'm a doctor – a man of science...Am I to have no right to –*

**The Mayor:** *The point at issue is not a purely scientific one; it is a complex question, with both technical and economic aspects.*

**Dr. Stockmann:** *As far as I'm concerned, it can be anything it damn well likes; but I mean to be free to speak my mind on any subject on earth.*

**The Mayor:** *As you please- so long as it does not concern the Baths. That we forbid.*

**Dr Stockmann:** *You forbid... You? A pack of-*

**The Mayor:** *I forbid it! I, you senior director. And when I forbid anything, you must obey.*

(Act II, 144-145)

The use of the word “forbid” implies that the Mayor has the authority to veto any expression by the doctor that he has not authorized. Declaring himself as “your chief” also constructs a false position of superiority for the Mayor and “have to obey” infers that the doctor’s position is untenable and obeying his brother’s declaration is the universally correct way to act. This interplay again creates more tension because Dr Stockmann refuses to kowtow to the politically based wishes of his brother. The tension affects the doctor when he is shouting at the Mayor in rage, “You forbid..! You! A pack of—.” In context, this is a dramatic outburst by Dr Stockmann because prior to this scene, Ibsen has portrayed the doctor as a man of moderate disposition. It is the doctor’s belief in personal rights or freethinking, as opposed to his brother’s dissembling, that causes the doctor to appeal to the masses and for his brother to plan a way of thwarting or censoring any attempt to reveal the condition of the baths.

Dr. Stockmann proves himself audacious and is persuaded that free and open expression is a necessity for a human being, proclaiming, “As far as I’m concerned, it can be anything it damn well likes; but I mean to be free to speak my mind on any subject on earth.” (Act II, 145) The mayor threatens his brother with dismissal from the staff of the Baths. Petra is horrified that free expression can meet with such punishment and speaks out, “Uncle, this is a disgraceful way to treat a man like Father” (Act II, 146) Ibsen stresses throughout the play that simply having ideas and talking about them behind closed doors is not an effective agent of social change. What is important is having the courage to express them openly and fearlessly.

In *A Public Enemy*, Henrik Ibsen offers us an uncompromising analysis of the ways in which cynical politicians in cahoots with the media can frustrate the message of an innocent enthusiast, even—or particularly—when that man is a fundamentally a political scientist. As a character, Dr. Stockmann has an innocent energy, a joy of life, a relish of open fighting and a recklessness that makes him completely incapable of petty political calculation.

*There is much of the absent-minded professor about him....He is extraordinarily credulous – in fact, an innocent. He has not lived in the big world, but in isolation “upnorth” away from the traffic of the cities and from his native town.” (Clurman: 1977, 129)*

He thinks that his dissension over the sewers and the waterworks will just end in closing the Baths for a limited time. He does not realize that this dissension will have other consequences. Nonetheless, not all this prevents him from having flourished seeds of revolution in his unconsciousness, which wait the appropriate time and place to burst. When the appropriate time and place come in Act IV, the explosion is ready and its destructive lava will demolish everything. The doctor manages to take the podium and, to the surprise of his fellow compatriots, states that he does not intend to speak about the Baths,

*I have a great revelation to make to you, my friends. I want to tell you about a discovery of much more far-reaching importance than the trifling fact that our water supply is poisoned, and that our curative Baths are built on infected ground.* (Act IV, 181)

Indeed, he is able to extrapolate the corruption at the Baths to the whole of society, “the discovery that it’s the very sources of our spiritual life that are poisoned – and that our whole community stands on ground that’s infected with lies!” (Act IV, 181). It appears at first that he will blame the community leaders:

*All I mean is that I got on the track of colossal muddle down at the Baths that our leading citizens are to blame for. I can’t, for the life of me, stand Leading Citizens – I’ve seen too many of ‘em in my time. They’re like billy-goats in a young plantation – destroying everything, and standing in the way of a free man wherever he turns. I only wish we could exterminate them like other vermin.* (Act IV, 183 )

Tumult erupts in the room, which fires up the doctor even more. Dr. Stockmann fears nothing, for he feels very strongly that he has truth on his side. He again rails against the leaders:

*You see, I cherish the comfortable belief that those sluggers – those relics of a dying school of thought – are very busy cutting their own throats! They don’t need any doctor’s help to speed them on their way. No, it isn’t people like that who are the greatest danger to the community.*

(Act IV, 184)

Dr. Stockmann reveals his utmost discovery, or supreme truth, “They’re not the ones who are poisoning our spiritual life at the source, and infecting the ground under our feet. They’re not the ones who’re the most dangerous enemies of truth and freedom in our society.” (Act IV, 184). The crowd demands, “who then? Who are they? Name them!” The doctor continues, “The most dangerous enemy of truth and freedom among us is ...the solid majority! Yes, the damned, solid, liberal majority – that’s it!” (Act IV, 184) Wild turmoil breaks out in the room.

Aslaksen demands the doctor withdraw his comment. But the doctor continues in the same vein regarding the majority as mongrels and asks how they could be trusted to govern at all:

*Dr. Stockmann: The majority never has right on its side...never, I tell you! That's one of the social lies that an intelligent, independent man has to fight against. Who makes up the majority of the population in a country – the wise men or the fools? I think you'll agree with me that, all the wide world over, nowadays the fools are in a quite terrifyingly overwhelming majority. And how the devil can it be right for the fools to rule over the wise men? (Act IV, 185)*

It appears that no one can stop the doctor now. He continues his argument, despite the chaos within the room. He responds to Hovstad's notice, "Ah, so the doctor's revolutionary now!" by saying, "Yes, by god, I am, Mr. Hovstad. I'm starting a revolution against the lie that truth and the majority go hand in hand." (Act IV, 186)

Dr. Stockmann's outburst and his way of disdaining the majority indicate that there is a kind of revolution rooted in his unconsciousness. Obviously, what is created in the unconsciousness is often illogical, transient and emotional. In such psychological revolution, ideas, beliefs and ideologies come suddenly and end quickly. Accordingly, the product of this part of human beings is illogicality and transience. Any revolution should emerge from the consciousness and it must be organized logically from the beginning to the end; its targets and means must be clear and comprehensible. Actually, Dr. Stockmann is not now so much concerned about the Baths as about revolution." The spectator easily observes that Dr. Stockmann's language of frustration and irritation in Act VI is not transitory eruption; it is part of a coherent belief, partly anti-democratic, as Ibsen's own philosophy generally was, partly aristocratic, partly violent and extremely narrow-minded. Ronald Gray continues in his argument by saying that,

*Stockmann is not the man who means seriously his talk of exterminating the opposition, yet this leap from critical objection to total and ruthless contempt makes Stockmann one of Ibsen's more childish egoists – no ordinary distinction – and reduces the political interest considerably. (Gray: 1977, 92)*

According to the Russian Marxist Georgi V. Plekhanov, Dr. Stockmann's revolution does not demand a radical changing in the social and political system. He believes that Dr. Stockmann was far from wishing the masses harm in requiring rebuilding of the Baths. Therefore, he was an enemy of the exploiting minority rather than of the masses. But in his battle against this minority he erroneously raises the very objections invented by those who fear the rule of the majority. Unintentionally, even unconsciously, he speaks here as a true enemy of

the people, as a political reactionary. Dr. Stockmann is fighting the majority since it refuses to accede to the complete reconstruction of the Public baths, which he feels to be so extremely necessary for the welfare of the sick. Under these circumstances, it should have been very simple for Dr. Stockmann to notice that the majority was on the side of the sick, who came to the town from far and wide, while those who objected to repairing the Baths were really in the minority. If he had recognized this, he would have understood how foolish it was to rail against the majority. The townspeople are actually under the influence of the shareholders of the Baths, the property owners, and the newspapermen and publishers and they followed these three powers blindly. In proportion to the first three groups, the townspeople obviously formed the “solid majority”. ( Act IV, 184)

*But if Dr. Stockmann had bothered to observe this, he would have discovered that the majority against whom he thundered...are not really enemies of progress; rather it is their ignorance and backwardness, which are products of their dependence upon a financially powerful minority.*

(Plekhanov: 1937, 44)

Although *A Public Enemy* is replete with sarcastic remarks about the compact majority, Ibsen is not attacking the concept of democracy itself. Instead, he levels his criticism upon the unscrupulous leaders and their naïve followers. Because they have vested interests and secret agendas, the bureaucrats mislead and misguide the public in order to get what they want and to stay in power. Ibsen shows how such leaders make a mockery of democracy. Stockmann appropriately refers to them as a social pestilence. However, all this makes Dr. Stockmann easy prey for the maneuverings of his powerful brother, Peter Stockmann, and for the scheming of the editor of the liberal paper, Hovstad, aided and abetted by his sidekick Billing and the printer Aslaksen.

The newspaper editors did support him and so did most of the town up until the Mayor got to them and told them that he was bad. The people knew that the Baths were contaminated but they were too afraid to voice their opinion in fear that they might be different and considered uncooperative to the town authorities. Therefore, the majority here represents people who do not want to stand out in a crowd no matter what is going to happen to them or the town. Here the deadly core of danger lurks when some of the groups that join the cause of liberty and progress are just as intolerant as their political opponents. If wishful thinking and life lies are common in the lives of individuals, they represent a greater danger when people behave in groups. Then it is much easier to deny one's own responsibility – both when it comes to critical thinking and insight in consequences of one's actions, as demonstrated in *A Public Enemy*.

Back at his residence, where the mob has thrown stones at the windows, Dr. Stockmann utters words of truth about parties and their leaders. Parties are



in Ibsen's vocabulary not limited to political parties, "A party is like a sausage – machine – it grinds all the brains together into a single mash – till you get nothing but a pile of blockheads and fatheads!" (Act, IV, 203) Ibsen also regards people who advocate moderation as a way of life as social pests. He knows that moderation is meaningless when radical measures are required to root out the evil that is corroding the society. Aslaksen is the symbol of moderation; he wants to please all the people all the time. As a result, he is fearful to take any stand, living on hypocrisy and lies. He acknowledges himself as a man of moderation by saying,

*And now, since I am in this position, may I be allowed to say a few brief words? I am a quiet, peace-loving man, who believes in temperate discretion – and discreet temperance...as everyone who knows me is aware.* (Act IV, 177)

In the play and in life, Ibsen values the truth above everything and in revealing it there should not be compromise or moderation. Dr. Stockmann is determined that the truth about the baths prevail in order to preserve the health and honor of the community. He states that suppression of truth is a "swindle – a lie, a fraud, a positive crime against the public – against the whole community." (Act II, 140) This is one of the main themes of Ibsen's *A Public Enemy*. Dr. Stockmann ingenuously states, "Yes, I love my native town so much that I'd rather ruin it than see it flourish on a lie" (Act IV, 192) He even suggests that all persons who live upon a lie ought to be exterminated like vermin, "All those who live by lies should be wiped out like vermin. It'll end in the whole country being infected." (Act IV, 192) Evidently, for Ibsen, nothing—neither economical nor political concern—should be more significant than speaking the truth. For him, this is something all individuals should strive to do, despite the inevitable conflict and hardship such may provoke. Indeed, for Ibsen, truth telling becomes the utmost in a human being's pursuit for self-actualization.

Ibsen endeavors to interpret his ideas about truth into action through Dr Stockmann. For instance, he demonstrates the false political position of the Mayor and his reasons for censuring his brother's report.

*Dr. Stockmann: ...It was you who arranged that both the Baths and the conduits should be where they are today...and that's what you won't acknowledge – that you've damnable blunder....*

*The Mayor: Even if that were true – even if I do cherish my prestige with a certain care, I do so in the interests of the town. Without my reputation for integrity, I could no longer guide and direct affairs in the way which I consider most conducive to the general good.* (Act II, 141)

In the above quotation, Dr. Stockmann brings his tension to a head by accusing his brother of trying to cover up his role in the "damnable blunder" of the

“baths and water conduits.” The implication is that the Mayor’s social/political ethics are to avoid blame for the baths problem. To “...guard my reputation” can be interpreted as an admission to deceiving the public, to keep his high social/political position and Mayoral “moral authority.”

It can be concluded that *A Public Enemy* has two key messages. First, it is a criticism of democracy. Second, it is the story of how one individual’s bravery and self-respect can survive overwhelming odds. Ibsen’s critique of democracy is twofold. First, he shows the tyranny of the majority. The majority is a tyrant insofar as the leaders of society are afraid to do what is right because they are at the people’s mercy. Even though Hovstad wanted to print the doctor’s report on the baths, he was afraid to do so because his subscribers would be upset. The Mayor cannot propose any changes to the baths because the public might find out that the Mayor had made a mistake in the original plans and, thus, oust him. The majority is afraid of risk and, according to the doctor, it is not intelligent enough to do what is right.

While Ibsen illustrates the tyranny of the majority, he also shows how leaders can manipulate the majority. When Aslaksen and the Mayor take control of the town meeting, they are manipulating the majority, using the majority to their ends. It could be that Hovstad merely cited his subscribers’ possible rage as an excuse because he himself did not want to print the article. More likely, both he and his subscribers would have been against the doctor. Those who are in power, like Hovstad and the Mayor, automatically guess what the majority will want, and they always try to please the majority. While Aslaksen and the mayor manipulated the audience at the town meeting, they influenced them in the only way possible. In other words, it would have been almost impossible for the Mayor to convince the crowd that they should support the doctor’s comments about the stupidity of the masses. Ibsen’s idea is that the majority does not rule directly; instead, the idea and threat of the majority keep leaders from acting honestly.

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